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O N

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ples. | IX. Of the Desires and first
Motions to Sin. |
| II. A Sermon on <i>Christmas-
Day</i> . | X. Of the unfruitful Works
of Darkness. |
| III. Of Publick Prayer and
Thanksgiving. | XI. Of setting God always
before us. |
| IV. Of not grieving the
Holy Spirit. | XII. Of perfecting Holiness
in the Fear of God. |
| V. Of the Future Judg-
ment. | XIII. The Excellency of
the Christian Religion. |
| VI. Of Faith and Works. | XIV. God no Respector of
Persons. |
| VII. That Afflictions cause
a just Sense of past Sins. | XV. Of doing good to all
Men. |
| VIII. Of the Folly and
Uneasiness of the Ways
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purified thro' the Spirit. |

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By the Right Reverend Father in GOD,
JOHN, late Lord Bishop of ELY.

Published from the Original MSS. by S. CLARKE, D.D.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N;

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ON Several Subjects:

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- III. Of Publick Prayer and
Thanksgiving.
- IV. Of not grieving the
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ment.
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- VII. That Afflictions can be
a just Sentence of past Sins.
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Uneasiness of the Ways.
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1694

JOHN late Lord Bishop of Ely.
By the Right Reverend Father in GOD,

Published from the Original MSS. by S. CLARKE, D.D.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N

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To the READER.

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THE Sermons collected in the former Volume, were all published singly, upon particular Occasions, by the Author in his Life-time.

Those contained in this Second Volume, were none of them ever before printed.

The Author had signified his Intention of publishing some Discourses of this kind, himself; but was prevented by Death. 'Tis probable, that many of these collected in the present Volume, are the same that he designed to make publick.

TO the READER.

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S. CLARKE.



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SERMON I.

I COR. IO. II.

Now all these things happened unto them for Examples, and they are written for our Admonition, upon whom the ends of the World are come.



PAUL was under sad and troublesome Apprehensions at the time when he writ this Epistle, and much concerned that it might have a due Influence upon the *Corinthians*, unto whom it was addressed. For dangerous Errors in point of Faith, and great Immoralities in matter of Practice, were early creeping into the Church of *Corinth*, which he, with constant Labour and Skill had planted,

and was nursing up with all Tenderneſs and Care.

Befides other Faults, into which now there is no need nicely to enquire; theſe were notorious, and are with true Juſtice ſeverely reprehended by the Apoſtle. Some Converts were for denying the Reſurrection, which is the Foundation of the Chriſtian Religion, and the Ground of all Divine Worſhip; the beſt Arguments for our loving, fearing, and adoring of God, being taken from the hearty Perſuaſion that we ſhall be raiſed from the Dead, and all be brought before the great Tribunal of Heaven, there to receive Judgment according to our Behaviour in this World. The Covetouſneſs or Pride of Other Converts made them Contentious, and to vex and grieve their Neighbours with Law-fuits, which were carried to the *Pagan* Magiſtrate to be decided; which unbelieving Judge muſt hereby be inclined to have mean Thoughts, of them and their Religion, which pretended to make Men ſo kind and peaceable, and ſo highly exalts and ſtrictly requires Charity.

Some Converts, out of Luxury, or Complaiſance, went to Idol Feaſts, which were made in Honour to the Idol, and the Meat ſuppoſed to have extraordinary Virtue or Holineſs in it, by having been thus offered; ſo that they involved themſelves in the Guilt of Idolatry, and gave much Offence to their Weak Brethren.

Others, who had not mortified their Luſts by Prayer and Fasting, fell into the heinous Sin of Fornication, frequently committed at theſe
Idolatrous

Idolatrous Feasts, which will shut Men out of the Kingdom of Heaven. There being hardly any Sin that does more than those of the Flesh estrange the Heart from God, and extinguish the Love of him in our Souls, and even root up the desires of imitating the Divine Purity, of purifying our selves even as he is pure.

We may further observe, that the several Parties who had so unreasonably endeavour'd to pervert the Truth, and so easily sunk into a Corruption of their Manners, did enter into a Combination to set up other Preachers in Opposition to *St. Paul*, in order to lessen and destroy his Authority, before whom they knew that they were no way able to defend either their Errors, or their Vices. But the good Apostle turned himself every way, made himself all Things to all Men, became a Servant to all; that is, he so far comply'd with the Infirmities both of the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Converts, as Piety and Truth would permit, that he might recover and save their Souls, now in a direct course of Perdition, and restore them to a sound Faith and good Life; so that they might walk worthy of their high Calling in Jesus Christ.

And as he was not wanting to assert his just Rights, and vindicate the Authority he had over them, which would turn so much to their spiritual Advantage; so he neglected no sort of Arguments which might convince them of their Mistakes, refute their false Notions, and reform their evil Conversation. In this Chapter he argues from the Case and Example of their Ancestors,

who were God's chosen People, and under his immediate Government; and shews, that notwithstanding they were God's peculiar Care, and that he miraculously protected them from their Enemies by a Cloud, and led them safely thro' the Sea, and wonderfully provided Water and delicious Food from Heaven, for them in the Wilderness; yet provoked by their Idolatry, and Fornication, and murmuring at the gracious Dispensations of his Providence, he slew above Twenty Thousand of them in one Day, suffering the Pestilence, that Instrument of his Wrath, to destroy and devour them.

Immediately after this Relation of God's having terribly punished their Forefathers for the hardness of their Hearts, and their obstinate adherence to their Sins, he presently subjoyns the Words in the Text. *Now all these Things happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our Admonition, upon whom the ends of the World are come.* In discoursing of which Words we have a proper Occasion,

- (1.) To consider the Use and Benefit of Examples, as well those that are recorded of former Times, as those which have and do occur to our own Experience.
- (2.) To shew how far the Examples of others may be a Rule for our Actions, and under what Limitations and Restrictions we ought to imitate them.
- (3.) To reflect on the great Obligation that lies on us to take a due Care of our own Example.

(1.) To

(1.) To consider the Use and Benefit of Examples, as well of those which are recorded of former Times, as those which have and do occur to our own Experience. By the Examples of Men, we understand what they have done, or suffered; and the Wisdom of God hath so order'd the Condition of the World, and the Course of Affairs in it, that whatever has been transacted in the Ages past, may be of Use to those which follow.

Observations upon Things acted in the remotest Distances of Time, have their Use, and bring their Advantages along with them. This we learn from our Holy Apostle. For he relates the Sins and the Punishments of the ancient *Jews* who lived in the beginning of the *Mosaick* Constitution, to reclaim the *Corinthians* from their heinous Vices, upon whom the Ends of the World were come, *i. e.* who lived when the Constitution of *Moses* was dissolved, and at an End; all the Types and Figures, and Sacrifices, and other positive Commandments in *Moses's* Law, ceasing and being no longer of any Use, after the gladsome and glorious Appearance of *Jesus Christ*, whom they did represent.

It is observable, that the same Sins for which God punish'd the *Israelites* after their first coming under the Government of *Moses*, were much the same with those that *S. Paul* reprehends in the New Christians of the Church of *Corinth*; and it was to be wish'd, that the Idolatry, Prophaneness, and Sensuality, which he condemns as inconsistent with the Holy State, did not abound in our Times, and

give us just Apprehensions, without a speedy and universal Repentance, of their pulling down God's Judgments upon us.

There is then no doubt, but that Examples of former Ages will enable us to form true Judgments of our own, and to rightly estimate our own Safety or Danger by what did befall them.

God's Nature is most perfect and unchangeable, Just, Holy, Merciful, and Pure; he ever has rewarded those that serve him, and relieved those that have humbly depended on him; but always destroy'd obstinate Sinners, and suffer'd them to perish in their Distress, who have confided wholly on their own Powers, and not called upon him in the Day of their Trouble.

And as God is eternally the same, so are the Differences between Good and Evil; which consist in the unalterable Conformity of the one, and Repugnancy of the other to the Divine Nature. The excellency of Piety and Virtue has a natural Tendency to the preservation and happiness, as well of whole Kingdoms as of particular Men; and Irreligion, Injustice, and Luxury sap the Foundations of all Society, and cut the Bands, and break the Frame of the best constituted Governments.

Industry, and Honesty, and Virtue, do not only increase and prolong the Life of single Persons, but firmly unite the Hearts and Hands of Men together in advancing the publick Good; And Idleness, Intemperance, Treachery and Lust, by the inherent Malignity of their own Nature do overthrow and dissolve all Community, and
 spoil

spoil and poison the strongest Constitutions ; they extinguish Love, Trust, and Affection, they introduce an universal Neglect and disregard of all Offices and Duties, blunt all reasonable Fears and Cautions against Danger ; and under such general Stupidity, all Things will readily run into Confusion.

And as the Attributes of God, and the natural Reasons of Virtue and Vice are Eternal and Unalterable ; so we find the Appetites, Passions, and Inclinations of Men very much alike in all Times ; and have therefore no reason to doubt, but that in the History of our Ancestors we shall find our Case stated. And ought to conclude, that what God hath done by Men in like Condition and Circumstances with ours, the same he will do unto us.

The long Enjoyment of God's great Favour, is no ground to a People still abiding in their Sins, to presume, that they shall always escape Punishment : With many of the *Jewish* Nation God was displeased, who had been under his wonderful Protection and Conduct ; and fiery Serpents, and the Sword, and the Plague were continually diminishing them, till at length the remnant of impenitent Sinners were carry'd Captive into a strange Land.

God hardly ever cuts Men off for their first Offence ; he waits that he may be gracious, and gives them time to consider of the Folly of their Doings, and to see the infinite hazard unto which they are exposing their Souls ; he invites them to Amendment by the most prevailing Arguments ; he discourages them from their Iniquities,

quities, by Threatnings most terrible and amazing : but when neither Mercies do allure and invite, nor Judgments awaken and affright them into Repentance, God withdraws his Grace and Protection from such hardned Criminals, and permits them inevitably to fall into such Destruction, as from which none can deliver them.

These great Truths concerning the Justice as well as the Goodness and Long-suffering of God, and the Folly and Presumption of Man, as they are agreeable unto the Divine Perfections, so are evident from the Experience and Examples of all Ages.

Noah, Abraham, and Lot are bright Examples of God's Love and Care ; and the unhappy Wife of *Lot*, a severe Example of God's Anger against them, who do not persevere in their Obedience to his Commandments unto the End.

From the Examples of *Joseph* and *Job*, good Men may receive Instruction not to distrust the Providence of God in the most distressed Condition, nor to despair of his Assistance, when no Humane Means appear for their Deliverance.

Joseph, by the Envy of his Brethren, was betray'd out of his Father's House, and by them sold a Slave into a Foreign Country ; where, upon the false Accusation of his wicked Mistress, he was cast into a loathsome Prison ; but notwithstanding he was reduced to so miserable a State as can well be imagined, he yet preserves his Innocency uncorrupted ; and in Recompence of his pure and unblemish'd Virtue, and entire dependence upon God, the Lord gave him favour
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in the Eyes of his Keeper, and then delivers him from the Dungeon, at a time when he could have no Expectations of it, and by ways he neither could foresee nor project; and advances him to the first Place next the King of *Egypt*, and causes him to become hereby the Preserver of the Lives of his Brothers, who had dealt so unnaturally and treacherously by him. And what is observed of pious *Joseph*, holds fully in the case of Righteous *Job*, and might be made out in a greater variety of Instances, had we time to dilate on them.

I would end this Head of Discourse with this general certain Observation, That how much soever the Law and Gospel may differ in other Respects, yet under both Dispensations, no Man ever did, or ever shall have God's Pardon of his Sins, but upon unfeigned Repentance; nor receive his Blessings, and partake of his Favour, but upon true Faith and sincere Obedience.

Upon these Terms only, our Lord, after he had overcome the sharpness of Death, did open the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers.

(2.) To shew how far the Examples of others may be a Rule of our Actions, and under what Limitations and Restrictions we ought to imitate them.

1. The Examples of others can never be a compleat Rule of our Actions, because, to the being of a compleat Rule, it is necessary that it should be plain and certain; but we not knowing the

the Hearts of other Men, nor the true Causes and Springs of their Actions, shall often be apt to mistake in forming Notions and Judgments of them; and after a diligent search, may be left in Doubts, and exposed to great Uncertainties. Thus, they differing often from us in Natural Parts and Temper of Mind, and in Education and Degrees of Knowledge; and as to the strength and frequency of Temptations, and in the Skill and Experience to resist them; what, according to the merciful Allowances of the Gospel may be a pardonable Offence in them, may prove a great Sin in us, and require a special Repentance to obtain the forgiveness of it.

2. The Actions and Examples of others, can be no perfect and entire Rule of our Conscience and Behaviour, because they sometimes are sinful and faulty in all Men. The best Men that ever have been, and that now are, could never formerly, nor can now, pretend to be without faults, and defects, and infirmities; in some things we offend all, and if we say we have no Sin, the Truth is not in us.

The most Holy Persons have ever been sensible of such Failings and Defects, as would warn and guard them against Presumption in their own Strength and Wisdom, and cause them to ask Forgiveness of God for their Trespases past, and beg Help against Temptations that may come. And therefore the Course and Example of their Lives, in which many Duties may have been omitted, and many evil things done which ought not to have been done, can be no entire Rule

Rule for us to proceed by, upon which our Consciences can safely depend.

3. The vast number of Circumstances in which the Condition of one Man does differ from another, makes it extreme difficult, if possible, to find the Case of even two Men to be exactly the same. So that was a Man always to resolve the Points and Scruples of Conscience only by the Carriage of others, the very Opportunities of doing our Duty would be often lost, before we could meet with truly parallel Cases, wherewith to satisfy our Minds.

4. To convince us that God never intended that the Example of other Men should be the adequate Rule of our Belief and Actions, we may observe that he hath joined Rewards and Punishments, not to our Conformity to, or Variation from the Doctrines and Practices of the best Men, but unto the Obedience of his Laws, or the Breach of them; and that therefore it would be most dangerous to rely wholly on them in the ordering of our Lives. For not the bare Judgment of any Man makes a Proposition, Doctrine, or Opinion true or false; nor will the mere Practice of what Man soever cause an Action to be good or Evil.

The only entire Rule then of Conscience, which can never deceive or mis-lead us, is the open Will of God, either publish'd by Divine Inspiration in the Holy Scriptures, or declared and made manifest by the Laws of Nature, and the clear Dictates of Reason.

From

From hence we may collect this general and invariable Rule, That we never can justify our selves by the Examples of others, in neglecting the Duties which God commands, or in doing the things which he forbids ; and no Mans Abilities or Authority can afford us ground for Encouragement to enterprize any such Matters as are repugnant to plain Reason, or contrary to common Honesty and Justice. Where there is a plain Rule, we need not consult Examples to resolve how we should behave our selves.

But indeed in things evidently Virtuous or Vicious, tho' there be no want of Light for our Resolution and Conduct, yet from good Examples we may receive Warmth and Stedfastness. It is true, that in Matters of no great Moment, and of a dubious and uncertain Nature ; and where there is no exprefs Law for their Decision ; the Judgment of the Learned, and the Practice of the Pious, should be principal Ingredients and Motives in the Determination of our Choice. And in these Cases that are somewhat doubtful and indifferent, it will ever be adviseable to have a regard to the Weaknesses of other Men, and to do what is most likely to preserve the Peace, and advance the Welfare of the Publick.

(3.) We come now to reflect on the great Obligation that lies on us all, to a strict Care of our own Example.

It may here be fit to be observed, That an Indifferency in Religion is the great Cause why Men
take

take no more care to set or imitate good Examples.

They who are perpetually dissolving the Strength of their Bodies, and the Vigor of their Understanding, in Idleness and Sensuality; never extend their Consideration beyond the present Life: The Thoughts of Heaven, which such impure Creatures are wholly unqualify'd to inhabit, and to which glorious Place they have no Pretensions of Right or Title, must strike Terror into them. Many, tho' not open Professors of Impiety, yet waste their Time upon what will not profit them. While they pursue little if harmless things, without which they might do very well; they neglect the one thing necessary, the Salvation of their Souls, without which they must be for ever miserable.

There are Men, who if they cannot justify their Behaviour, yet would excuse it, and speak smooth Things to their Consciences, by a perverse use of Examples. They compare their Actions with those of other Persons, whom they suppose more wicked than themselves; and by discovering Faults, of which they do not apprehend themselves Guilty, they very erroneously conclude their own Condition to be safe and good.

This is the Deceit the proud *Pharisee* put upon himself: He reckon'd up several Sins from which he abstained, and divers Duties which he had performed; and then vainly gives himself the Preference to the poor Publican. But under this Shew of Religion, lay hid many heinous Sins
in

in that well painted, but unsound Sepulchre, his Heart. Wherefore our Lord, who knew Mens Hearts, reverses his Sentence, and rather justifies and prefers the humble Publican before him.

Rightly then to inform our Judgments, we are not only to make a Comparison with Men worse than our selves, but with those who, with like Knowledge and equal Means and Opportunities of becoming good, have far exceeded us in a holy Course of Life; and with such who have had fewer Talents, and less Help, yet have equal'd us in the Performance of all Christian Duties.

'Tis very dangerous to think highly of our selves, and to be pleased with our own Actions; for it will naturally lead us into Security and Presumption. Self-complacency will hinder our being so constantly and strictly upon the Watch against Temptations, and abate the Earnestness of our Desires to make farther Improvement of our Christian Graces and Virtues. It was by too great a Confidence in his own Courage, that St. Peter fell, and shamefully deny'd his Blessed Master.

Another way of Mens deluding their precious Souls, proceeds from the multitude of bad Examples: The Sins committed every where by almost all Ranks and Conditions of Men, they think very excusable in themselves; as if what is Virtue, and what is Vice, was to be determined by the greater number of Voices; that they who do but what every Body does, shall escape without Punishment: Whereas the Nature of Moral
Good

Good and Evil, is unchangeable, and fixt, and not capable of the least Variation.

How plausible soever this Pretence may be in its first Appearance to the Sinner, yet duly weighed, it can afford no true Peace, or solid Comfort to his Conscience. Does he consider our Saviour's Declaration, that *wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and that many* (constantly pressing and pushing one another forward) *do miserably enter thereat*? Can there be any Ease or Satisfaction in going down to the infernal Regions of Darkness in vast Crowds and Companies of reprobate Men, as miserable and helpless as our selves, who neither can speak one comfortable word, nor do one kind thing to us? Their Shrieks and their Cries must rather heighten our Horrors, especially if they can charge their Ruin upon our wicked Examples. Does the Sinner not remember the Commandment of the Lord, Not to follow a multitude to do Evil? Can he forget that God provoked by the great Wickedness of Men, caused an universal Flood, and cut all the Inhabitants, except *Noah* and his Family, from off the Face of the Earth?

For the Conviction of Unbelievers, it may here be fit to be taken notice of, that the petrified Fish and Shells, which are found on the tops of most Mountains in all Countries, are a natural Demonstration of the Truth of this Piece of Divine History, that God once overwhelmed the whole Earth with Water. Let us consider, that in the Verses immediately going before the Text,
the

the Apostle exhorts them not to *tempt Christ*, and provoke him by their Murmurings at the wise Dispensations of his Providence, as their Forefathers had done, and were destroy'd in great numbers by *Plagues and fiery Serpents*. The Sinners found no Safety by their Multitudes; and if it was so great a Crime to offend Christ, only while he was represented by Figures and Shadows, how much more heinous will our Offence be, who carry our selves with more Disrespect and Undutifulness towards him after his real Appearance in the Flesh, and That clear Evidence that he has given of Eternal Life and Immortality by the Gospel.

That this Consideration may have the more Efficacy on our Minds, I will represent it in the Words of our great Apostle: *He that despised Moses law, died without mercy:—of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall be be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing; and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace; they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

It can be no part therefore of true Wisdom, to be usually enquiring into the Errors and Failings of other Men, by us thought to be not so good as our selves; since the delighting our selves with such Enquiries, may occasion Spiritual Pride, and a Neglect of the due Care of our Immortal Souls.

Neither

Neither venture on any Sin, because a great deal of Company join with you in it; for if numbers have sometimes Power to break thro' Human Laws, yet they will be no more able at the Bar of Heaven to defend themselves against the Divine Justice, than single Persons.

Thus when *whole National Churches* have departed from their Primitive Faith and Purity, God hath removed their Candlesticks, and permitted them to be cover'd with thick Darkness.

And when the Impieties of Kingdoms and Empires have come up to a Ripeness fit for Destruction, how Large and Potent soever they were, God has caused them to be presently pulled down, by those who could not compare with them either in Force or Number; that all Men might see that it was the Lord's doing.

The Use to be made of all this is, that we should have no other Eye or Regard to other Mens Crimes, than to avoid them; that we should not insult, but pity them for their Follies, and with a stricter Caution decline the Rocks and the Sands on which they did miscarry.

Not in the ordering of our Lives to follow the giddy and unthinking Multitude, who like the Horse and the Mule act with no Understanding, but are driven by Noise, and seduced by the Crafty into every Evil Thing.

But in the Government of our Thoughts, Words, and Deeds, set before us the most Holy and Wise Examples: Let the Doctrines of our ever Blessed Master, the Lord Jesus, be the Rule
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of our Faith, and let his Commandments be the Law of our Manners.

Whatsoever he has taught, we ought to believe, as the greatest Truth; and what he enjoins and requires, is to be the sole Standard and Measure of our Obedience, and the great Exemplar and Pattern for our Imitation. Let us set him before us in all our ways; believing him, obeying him, imitating him, with all our Heart, and all our Might, so far as the Infirmities of our Nature can approach his Divine Perfections.

Is it not a prevalent and most moving Argument to place our Mind and Affections upon Things which are above, to consider, that the same serious Thoughts, and moderate Labour and Pains, which will gain a small Estate, that can be but a short time preserved, will certainly procure us an everlasting Inheritance in the Heavens; against which no Ejectment can be brought; where no Interruption or Disturbance can be given to our pure and most satisfactory Joys; which will continue in the highest Perfection to all Eternity?

Let us then have always in our Eye the most noble Examples of Piety and Virtue: Let us be Followers of Christ and his holy Apostles, as they also were Followers of him: Let us ever be endeavouring to copy after those Patterns of Godliness, and Submission to the Divine Will, which have been set us by the noble Army of Martyrs, and goodly Fellowship of Prophets, and the Holy Church throughout the World; and this not only

ly to our own Good, but the inestimable Advantage which others will receive by it who know or behold us.

The Force of Rules cannot be apprehended without Thoughts and Meditation; but good Examples do, as it were, embody Virtue, and make it visible to the Eyes; and without trouble or difficulty, Men are powerfully and immediately attracted by the Splendor and Beauty with which it does adorn those happy Persons who do possess it.

And the higher the Station is, wherein they are placed who set good Examples, so much the farther the Example is seen, and the stronger Influence it hath upon others: The Examples of Persons in Authority put on the Nature of Laws, and do not persuade, but force and oblige Men to be Holy, Just, and Merciful.

But no body ought to have a more tender and exact Care of their Examples, than the Ministers of the Gospel; nothing being of more Consequence to the true Interest of Religion; nor that will make Sermons to have a more engaging Operation on the Hearts of the Hearers, than the good Name, and the humble and holy Conversation of the Preacher.

But Exhortations to Virtue will be received coldly from them who live viciously, and are mere Strangers to the Piety, Meekness, and Purity which they recommend; whereas *they that be wise* (and teach their Knowledge, and display their Virtue to others) *shall shine with the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many*

to righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever,
Dan. 12. 3.

And what Ground of Comfort must it be to a Pious Minister, for many to say, that, converted by his wise and zealous Exhortations, they were brought to a Sense of their Danger, and broke off their Sins by timely and hearty Repentance? What Peace and Joy must it raise in his Soul, for them to Acknowledge in the Presence of God and his Angels, that he was the Instrument of their Conversion; and that they obeying his true Doctrine, and following his Religious Example, did arrive safe at the Haven of Everlasting Happiness: and to continue blessing God for ever, for the invaluable Good they obtained by his faithful Performance of all the Parts of his Pastoral Care and Duty towards them.

I conclude with a Collect in our publick Prayers.

Almighty God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a Sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life; give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour our selves to follow the blessed steps of his most Holy Life, thro' the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SER-



SERMON II.

St. J O H N III. 16.

*For God so loved the World, that he gave
his only begotten Son : that whosoever
believeth in him, should not perish, but
have everlasting Life.*

¶ ¶ ¶ ¶ HEN Men led very ill Lives, and had
¶ w ¶ very false Notions of Religion, insomuch
¶ ¶ ¶ ¶ that all their Deeds seem'd to proceed
from brutish Passion ; when they were in-
temperate, cruel, and given up to strange Lusts, and
their Religious Service was degenerated into Ido-
latry, they worshipping Birds, Beasts, Wood and
Stone, in the place of the Supreme Deity ; when
their many Disputes about Good and Evil, did
but little mend and refine their Lives, and they
did grope in the dark after the True God, and
were full of Controversies about the future
State :

When the *Jews* had been some Hundred Years without ever a Prophet, and the Will of God was not revealed from Heaven to them in an extraordinary manner, as it had usually been to their Forefathers: When they were heavily oppress'd by their powerful Neighbours; and their State and Government form'd by God, were very near Destruction: When the *Pharisees* and Doctors had wretchedly corrupted the Laws of *Moses*, and perverted the great Design of them by their unnatural Glosses: When their whole Nation groan'd under the *Roman* Yoke, and longed for the coming of the Messiah, and they were daily searching after the Time of his Appearance in their own Prophets: Then it was, that God in Compassion to his poor Creatures, tired with fruitless Enquiries after Knowledge, and defiled all over with their abominable Wickedness, did send his own Son to instruct and enlighten their Understanding with Divine Truth, and to purify their Hearts and Manners with Heavenly Graces and Virtues, and to save them from the Wrath and Vengeance which their Sins would have brought upon them, by a Sacrifice made of his own Blood:

That God so lov'd the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, &c. From which Words we may,

(1.) Observe the Cause from whence the Redemption of Mankind did proceed; it was from the Love of God.

(2.) The

(2.) The vast Compass of the Divine Love; it did extend it self to the whole World.

(3.) The Greatness and Excellency of the Gift, which God did bestow on Mankind; it was *his only begotten Son*, which he did give for their Redemption.

(4.) The easy Terms by God propounded, upon which every Man may have the Benefit and Advantages of this Gift; *whosoever believes in him*, &c. An hearty Belief, sincere Trust and Dependance upon him.

(5.) The great End of it, to rescue Men from the greatest Misery, and to secure unto them Eternal Happiness; *that they might not perish*, &c.

(1.) The Cause from whence the Redemption of Mankind did proceed, it was the Love of God. The Love of God is a most noble Argument to exercise our Meditations upon; at this Time especially, when God sent us his own Son to lay down his Life to save ours: Than which, God could not have shewn a higher Token of his infinite Goodness, nor we have received a greater Blessing or greater Benefit and Advantage.

It was the Love of God which first brought the World into Being; and ever since it had a Beginning, all that has past between him and his Creatures, is a full Proof of his infinite Goodness. Not any one Dispensation of his Providence among the Children of Men, but it has favour'd of his Love and Compassion. Love in

God, is a boundless Propension to do good to all his Creatures; which first employ'd his Almighty Power in producing them out of nothing, and then engaged his Wisdom in contriving their Happiness.

Every considering Man will be satisfy'd, that God could have no other Motive to make all or any of his Creatures, but his unconceivable Goodness; who was infinitely perfect before they were made; and being thus compleatly perfect from all Eternity, he could receive no Advantage or Addition from their Creation.

He did not want their Counsel in contriving his Designs, nor their Company to divert and entertain him, nor their Hands to help in carrying on of his great Works; who can both give Being to Worlds, and reduce them to nothing with the Breath of his Nostrils; who at once sees and does fully comprehend all that ever has been, or which now is, or ever shall come to pass: Who is the eternal Foundation of all Wisdom, Goodness, and Power. Who is infinitely Happy in the Contemplation of the Excellencies of his own most glorious Nature.

Goodness then, as I may so say, is the governing Principle in the Deity, which does exercise all the other Attributes, and is the very Root of the Divine Perfections. Of which we still shall be the more sensible, when we reflect, that God did not give to us the Being of Stones or Trees, or Brute Beasts; but made us Men, and in the likeness of his own Blessed Nature, and order'd all these lower Parts of the Creation to serve us.

It was an Act of great Goodness in God, to place us in so high an Order and Rank among his Creatures, whereby we become Lords and Rulers of the lower World, and receive a Tribute, and reap a Benefit from almost every thing therein; down from the glorious Sun which does guide us by his Light and comfort and cheer us by his Heat, unto the smallest living things, and the Green Herbs and tender Plants of the Field, who, in their turns, serve to relieve our Hunger, or to heal our Maladies.

It was an Act of exceeding Love, not only thus to make the rest of the Creation beneficial unto us, but to stamp and impress upon our Nature the Resemblance of Himself, in such Faculties and Powers as enable us to know our Maker, who has done so great things for us; to admire his Wisdom, which has contriv'd the World so usefully for our comfortable Subsistence; to fear his Power, which keeps the Creatures in such due Subjection and Order, that we may have the quiet Enjoyment of them; to adore his infinite Goodness, which is the Foundation, and was the first Mover in the Divine Nature, to confer so happy a Condition upon us.

Moreover, we shall make a farther Discovery of the infinite Love of God, by reflecting, that he who first not only bestow'd Life upon us, but all things necessary for its continuance, does take a special Care over us and all our Concerns, in preserving us from those Dangers, which would, some of them, immediately put an End to our Lives;

Lives; and others, destroy all the Conveniencies and Comforts of Life.

He does not only secure us from the Violence of Fire and Water, but from the Malice of our selves, whereby we are excited to destroy one another.

He delivers us from Evils, when they are very near us, and when we did not suspect them; he snatches us out of the Jaws of Destruction when it's ready to gape upon us, and wonderfully stops us in the very Way which would end in the loss of our Lives.

And this Care of God which reaches unto our Lives, and all the good Things which are needful for their Support; is not only at some Times and for certain Seasons, now and then, by fits and by starts, as he may have Leisure, or Inclination; but it is constant and perpetual; The Divine Providence does Watch over us Day and Night; as well when we Sleep, as when we be Awake: It remembers and pities us, when we have no regard to our own Safety, and kindly rescues us from the Evils of our own Chusing.

It is possible for Parents to forget their Children, and a little matter sometimes will estrange their Affections from them; and the Mother has proved Unnatural to the harmless sweet Babe that did hang upon her Breasts, and hardened her Heart against the Fruit of her Womb: But God is always the same, Yesterday, to Day, and for Ever; his Providence is Uniform, and ever in the like Degrees; his Goodness unexhaustible; he never forgets those who Trust in him, being
without

without the least Variation, or shadow of Change.

And thus I have given some small Account of the Divine Goodness and Love, with relation to the excellent Nature God gave us, and the merciful and tender Care his Providence has had of us, ever since we came into Being : Now we are to advance a step farther, and consider the Love of God as it concern'd it self about us in our Fall, and Misery, and Redemption. And in this Enquiry, Admiration will overwhelm us; for we shall discover nothing but Miracles of Mercy, and the real Effects of inexpressible and unconceivable Goodness.

And the first Thing we here shall remark, will lead us to the next Head of this Discourse, viz.

(2.) The vast Compass of Divine Love, which did extend it self to the whole World. And from hence we may observe how far the Gospel of Christ does excel the Law of *Moses*; which was confin'd only to the *Jewish* Nation; but Christ makes a Covenant, not only with the Seed of *Abraham*, but the whole World. The Remedy he has provided, does cast its Influences, as far as the Sin of our first Parent had spread its Infection. As in *Adam* we all dy'd; so in Christ all are made alive. No one Creature, how vile, impotent, and grievous a Sinner soever he has been, is by God shut out from the infinite Mercies of his Son's Redemption.

And

And what a Comfort must this be to those desponding Souls, who because their Sins have been great, or many, or of a long Continuance, are ready to despair of Mercy; to hear, that God's Love does extend to the whole Race of Mankind! How may it serve to deliver these unhappy Christians from their terrible Fears that they are barred from the Fruits of Christ's Death by an irrevocable Decree; to find that the Spirit of God has published, that the Lord Jesus did die not only for our Sins, but the Sins of the whole World.

Indeed, we merciless Men, who can hardly forgive the smallest Wrong, or put up the most trifling Injury, or digest the least Affront; may be astonished at the Goodness of God, which puts every Man who had offended him into an easy Capacity of obtaining Reconciliation. When so many had transgressed; for him to spare all, and to make never an Example of his severe and strict Justice; is an Act of such infinite Grace and Favour, as could only proceed from the great God, whose Compassions are never drained, and whose Mercy do overshadow all his Creatures. But further, we must still the more admire and adore the wonderful Love of our Maker, when we consider, that notwithstanding he has made all his Creatures to share in his Mercy, yet not any one of them did deserve it, or could make the least pretence thereunto.

We had not performed to God any grateful Services before our Fall, whereby we might claim some Right to his Love: He in no Degree

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was beholden to Man, who in his most Innocent State had never supererogated, or done more than his Duty. Besides, if there was any Thing in Man, which might be pleasing unto God, It must be his own Image. But That, he had miserably defaced in his Fall. Wherefore having lost his Innocence, and in That the Divine Likeness; there was nothing remaining in him that could be acceptable to his Maker; but he sinking into a deform'd and ugly Shape and Condition, must become the Object of his high Displeasure. Thus Man by Sin fell from the Favour of God; and while God was his Enemy, there could be no hope of regaining his first Happiness.

But the way to reconcile God, he knew not. There was no visible Means, no possible Art appeared to make Peace, and to recover God's Kindness and Good-will; Man's Disease seem'd incurable; all the Powers of Nature were too dim to light and guide him to a Physician who could heal him; too weak to assist him. He had never a Friend who had Interest to interpose in his Behalf; he had nothing to make Satisfaction, no one Thing left in him to provoke God to pity his miserable State.

Wherefore God himself did as well find out the Means of Man's Salvation, as make Use of them. It was his Goodness that first discovered the way to redeem his lost Creature; and then enter'd into it, and put his most wise Discovery into speedy Execution.

God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, &c.

(3.) The

(3.) The Greatness and Excellency of the Gift which God did bestow upon Mankind; it was his only begotten Son which he did give for their Redemption. God did not send a Servant, or an Angel upon this weighty Message; but the Son of his Bosom, his only Begotten Son (to distinguish him from all Creatures, so is he called) who might mediate in our Behalf, pacify the divine Justice, and procure Terms of our Reconciliation.

Hence it appears how pressing our Necessities were, how dangerous our Case, how unspeakable God's Love to us; that he should part with his most dear Son, and suffer him to come down, and not only to live among us, but to die for us. This is a Myſtery we must admire, a Myſtery which the Angels stoop to look into, but can never fathom it. By taking our Nature upon him, Christ became a perfect Mediator between God and us; and by being God, he was able to make a compleat Satisfaction for our Offence.

O! the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of our Lord! For had he been only God, he could not have suffer'd for us; and had he been only Man, he could never have been able to have made Satisfaction for us. This is that Saviour so much desired, so much needed by the sinful World.

But at his coming, Idolatry had in a manner cover'd the Earth, it had vilely sully'd and corrupted all the natural Notices Men had of Virtue and Vice; it had almost destroy'd the Impressions on their Souls, of the One only true God; their Understandings were exceedingly darken'd,

and

and their Wills horribly depraved; they fell down before Plants, four-footed Creatures, and creeping Things, and the very Stones and Timber which they themselves had carved and graven, paying a Divine Adoration to every Thing, but the Supreme God himself.

Nay, what was most strange, most absurd, and abominable; they were so besotted in their Judgments, so debauched in their Manners, and so much in Love with their Wickedness, as to worship the very Causes of their Sins, as so many Gods; they being Cruel, and Blood-thirsty, and Revengeful, did imagine, that the Causes and Temptations which push'd them on to such Barbarous Acts, was a God, and therefore they erected Altars to this Cruel God, and made a Sacrifice answerable to the implacable Hatred they supposed he had for Mankind.

Thus dragged on by their own blind Fears, they offer'd up their Sons and Daughters, making the Altars to reek with the Blood of their own Children.

So also, being given up to all Uncleaness, and being most brutish in the gratification of their Lusts, how many Days and Feasts did they Consecrate to the impure Goddesses of Love!

And when miserable Man was so deeply sunk in his Sins, and Wickedness had made so great a Head in the World, against Heaven, and all that was good and holy, God thought it high time to pity his distressed Creature, and to provide effectual Relief for his most desperate and deplorable Case.

And

And so the Messiah came, who had been promised from the beginning of the World, and was look'd for in all Ages; but more vehemently wish'd for, and more generally expected about the very Time in which he made his joyful Appearance in the World. Having taken our Nature and Flesh upon him, whereby he became perfect Man, obnoxious to the Weakness of our Condition; and submitting himself to all the Dangers, Hardships, and Infirmities of Human State.

And when he was among us, he steadily apply'd himself to the great Ends of his being constituted a Mediator between God and Man. He went about, doing Good; not fixing himself to one Place or Country, not confining his Favours to his Friends and Acquaintance, his Kinsmen, or those of his own Flesh and Blood, the Seed of *Abraham*; but he communicated the Effects of his Goodness to Men of all Times and Places, of all Sects and Religions, of all Nations, and of all Conditions and Degrees, to the poorest of the People and the worst of Sinners. He condescended to eat with Publicans, the ungratefulness of whose Employment had made them odious to the People; and with Sinners, who were notorious for their Crimes; that by this free and familiar Conversation he might have the better Opportunity to instil his Holy Doctrines into their Minds, and to make them the more sensible of the Badness and Danger of their present Life, and so the more effectually to reclaim and recover them. He did not reject Persons guilty of Adultery, nor re-

fulse his Grace to save those who had been possess'd with Devils.

He went about and sought Occasions to do Good; it was the perpetual Study of his Life to relieve the Necessities, and succour the Distresses of his new adopted Brethren, the whole Race of *Adam*.

All which he brought to pass, by establishing a new Covenant between God and his revolted Creatures, *who lay in darkness and the shadow of death*; and sealing it with his own Blood, offer'd up on the Cross a sufficient Sacrifice to compensate the Injury done to God by the Offence of Man, and to atone for the Sins of the whole World. And it must be the highest Act of Almighty Love in the Son of God, to expose himself to the Shames of an ignominious, and to suffer the Pains of a cruel Death, that he might Ransom us from the intolerable Pains and Miseries of Eternal Death.

But the Redemption of Mankind being Establish'd upon a Covenant, and Salvation not being obtainable but according to the Terms of this Covenant; this Blessed Saviour of ours, did shew himself infinitely concern'd, and took the greatest care, not only that the Terms of this Covenant might be fully publish'd to Men, but be by them exactly observ'd.

It was therefore his Meat and Drink to discover the Righteous Will of his Father, and make known all useful Truths, while he was on Earth; and after his Ascension, to send Men inspir'd with his Holy Spirit, who might declare the en-

ture Pleasure of God : So that there is no Truth, or Duty, fundamental either to our Faith or Practice, but it is revealed so clearly, and distinctly, and plainly in the Holy Scriptures, that those of the least Learning, and weakest Understandings, may (if they do not neglect themselves) come to the Knowledge of all that is necessary either for them to believe, or to do, in order to their everlasting Salvation.

Moreover, our dear Lord did not content himself with only shewing us the ways of Happiness, but with the greatest importunity he entreats us to go into them, that so it may be well with us in this Life, and that which shall be hereafter. He did not think it enough to point to us the Means of Salvation, but he earnestly woo's us to accept them : And this not once only, but he does Day by Day repeat his kind Invitations to come unto him in the hour of our Trouble and Sorrow; and he will ease our Souls of the heavy burdens of their Iniquities, heal their Sores, and put Balsom into their Wounds; and he will guide us into all Truth, help us with his Grace to keep all his Precepts, and support us with his Spirit under all Sufferings and Afflictions.

He very often, and most vehemently beseeches us to comply with his reasonable and easy Proposals, for attaining a joyful Immortality; he still offers us That help we have despised, that Spirit we have affronted, that Grace we have trampled upon, and with much long-suffering waits, trying, if possibly at length we will be per-

perswaded to escape utter Ruin both of Soul and Body. And all this compassionate Care is extended to us wretched Men, vile Hypocrites, ungrateful Sinners, who are foolish beyond all comparison, proud of our own Weakness and Vanity, abusers of the Divine Patience, dead in our Sins and Trespases, unto every good Work reprobate, and alienated from the Life of God thro' the Ignorance that is in us, and by the Blindness of our Hearts.

Considering our great Aversion to yield to the importunate Requests of our Saviour, it might be imagin'd that the Conditions he would hold us to, were insupportable to Human Nature, or clash'd with our clearest Reason; were either so difficult, as we despaired the getting the mastery over them; or dishonourable, that we could not engage in them, without reflecting upon the Excellence and Dignity of our Being. But now that God Commands us nothing, which is too hard for Men to do, assisted by his Grace; or to believe, which is repugnant to our Reason; or to submit to, which is below the Dignity and Honour of our Nature: will be evident in the next Part of this Discourse.

(4.) The easy Terms upon which every Man may receive the Benefit and Advantages of this Gift: *That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Whosoever believes in him,* that is the condition here express'd. In giving some account whereof, we ought to be careful, that while we are shewing that the Duties

ties of Christian Religion are not so frightful and grievous, as idle Men, who never try'd them, may fancy ; or as wicked Men, who hate them, may pretend ; we do no injury to it by making the Terms fewer than they really are, or by representing them in such a loose Sense, as may destroy the Force and Efficacy of them.

It is therefore fit to be observed, that by believing in Christ, the only begotten Son of God, we are not to understand a bare belief, or naked assent of the Mind, that he is the Son of God, and the Messiah who came to redeem us ; which does include no Obedience to his Precepts, or require no Piety and Virtue in our Lives.

But to believe in Christ, is to own his Religion, to embrace his Gospel, and to undertake the Performance of all the Laws and Conditions of it. And if we do sincerely believe him to be the Son of God, and that all Doctrines he has publish'd, are true ; and that all the things he has commanded are just and reasonable ; and if we heartily place our trust in him, and depend wholly upon his Goodness for our present Support and future Felicity, we then most certainly shall think our selves strictly obliged, not only to believe all that he has taught, but to endeavour to do all that he requires and expects from us.

And having observ'd, that a saving or justifying Faith does ever, by necessary consequence, suppose a Holy Life to accompany it, and a sincere Obedience to every Precept of the Lord and Master in whom we do believe ; we may now

briefly reflect upon the Nature of the Laws which he hath enacted for us to observe.

And if we will consider, that the Laws of our Religion are so admirable in the Effects they have upon all who observe them, clearing and enlarging the Understanding, purifying the Heart, and raising it up above the mean and the brutish Enjoyments of this World; we shall hold our selves bound to yield Obedience to them, not only in point of Duty, because God has commanded it, but out of Interest, because thereby we shall so highly improve our selves. *What does the Lord require of thee, O man, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before the Lord thy God?* We plainly see, that there is not one of these Commands, which does set forth God as a strict and severe Master, who minding only himself, and carrying his own Ends, does not care how harshly and severely he uses his Servants; or express him to be a tyrannical Lord, who is without Bowels towards those in his Power, and does delight himself in their Sufferings and Misery.

But on the contrary, all his Commandments are but so many Exercises of our Love and Affections, and so many Tokens of his Mercy; so many Instances of his Kindness to his distressed Creatures, and so many Means to make us more Perfect, and to improve our Happiness.

So far is God from imposing Burdens exceeding our Strength, or from suffering Destruction to come upon us without our own Fault.

(5.) And lastly, we have here represented two chief Instances, wherein this Redemption, wrought for us by the Son of God, does consist; *viz.* a Delivery of us from the greatest of Evils, and a Security to us of the greatest of Happinesses. *That we should not perish, but have everlasting life:* They who are Partakers of the Redemption, which our dear Lord obtain'd by his own most precious Blood, shall be deliver'd from both the Natural and the Moral Cause of Death.

The Natural Causes of Death are such as produce Corruption in the Parts of the Body, which being no longer able to discharge the several Offices by Nature therein assign'd them, the Body does decay, moulder, and consume away, and so ceaseth to be a fit Habitation for the Soul's longer abode, which taking its leave of it, That Separation follows, which we call Death.

But those Holy Men, who thro' the Mediation of Christ, shall attain to the Resurrection of Life, their Bodies shall be freed from all those Qualities that cause Corruption and Decay, Sickness and Disorder; *For this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible, incorruption.*

They likewise shall be pardoned the Guilt, and delivered from the Power and Dominion of their Sins; which were the Moral Cause, and drew down from Heaven the Sentence of Death upon our first Parent.

And in this perfect Condition of Body and Soul, they by Angels shall be carried into Heaven, and be made Partakers of Everlasting Life; where

where they shall be raised to the highest pitch of Glory their Nature shall be capable of; their Joys shall be most intense, and without the least Disturbance or Abatement; they shall Converse with Angels and Holy Men, who in every Age feared God, and did good to their Fellow-Creaturs; they shall Stand in the Presence of their dearest Redeemer, and Magnify, and Praise, and Adore the Great God for Ever and Ever.

It only remains, that we make some Improvement of this Argument before the Conclusion.

(1.) If our Redemption be wholly due to the only Begotten Son of God, let us ascribe the Honour thereof only to him, and only thank him for it; let us direct our Prayers to none but him, and depend upon his Goodness wholly for all we have, or ever we can hope for.

How can we Worship Images, or Pray to Saints, or put up more Supplications to the Virgin *Mary*, than to Jesus Christ; without Robbing our Lord of his incommunicable Right or Due, and making the Power of a Creature equal to that of our Blessed Lord and Saviour? Nay, he who makes many Prayers more to her than Christ, (as is the daily Practice in the Church of *Rome*,) does not he by so many Degrees advance a Creature above God?

(2.) Let us observe, that notwithstanding Christ has taken our Cause in his Hands, and does sollicite it with his Father, making daily Intercessions with him in our Behalf, representing all our Wants, begging Supplies for our Necessities, Compassion for our Weaknesses, and Allowances for

for our Mistakes and Errors, and does as sincerely and passionately desire our Success as we can ourselves; yet he being in the Condition of a Mediator, is concern'd on both sides, as well for God as for us; as well to engage us to do our Duty, as to prevail with God to grant us his Gracious Assistance: And how great soever his Affections are for us; they will never prevail with him to do any thing contrary to God's Will for our Sake, or to endeavour to procure us Salvation upon other Terms and Conditions, than those agreed upon in the New Covenant made between God and him for our Salvation.

And therefore, if we will not turn from our Wickedness, he will be as much bound to condemn us, being our Righteous Judge; as he will think himself obliged to save our Souls alive, if we do that which is Lawful and Right.

If then Christ looks upon himself as a middle Person between God and us, as much obliged on the one Hand to maintain his Father's Honour, as on the other to obtain our Pardon; how great a Danger do those poor Creatures run, who hope for Salvation upon easier Terms than those agreed upon in the New-Covenant, and boldly expect more Mercy from God, than what he has promised in the Gospel!

Do they imagine God had not time enough to finish his New Covenant, or wanted foresight to discover the Inconveniencies which would follow from it; or that he did not sufficiently weigh and consider all the Circumstances of so great a Cause, as that where the Life and Blood of his Son,

Son, as well as the Redemption of Mankind, was concerned; that he must now relax or alter the Laws of the Gospel, and make a New Religion for their Sakes? That is, That they might have more Liberty to affront God, and prophane his great Name, to be proud, cruel, and revengeful, and to wallow in all beastly and swinish Lusts, and at last, to be secure of a place in the Kingdom of Heaven?

I would fain know, what ground any Wise Man can discover, to delude himself with such most dangerous and unreasonable Presumptions.

(*Lastly,*) Let me exhort you all to be more in good earnest when you Address your selves to the Worship of God; and to allot so large a Portion of your Time to meditate upon and consider the great Reasons for the Truth of your Religion, that you may heartily Believe it. For if our Belief was much Stronger, certainly also our Lives would be much Better. O! that we would take true Pains to clear up such Truths unto our Minds, which are of infinite Importance to our immortal Souls.

It is the Wickedness of Man, which makes it so hard for him to believe, that the Son of God should unite himself to our Flesh: yet God does many other Things, which are as hard for us to conceive. Where therefore the Divine Revelation is clear, we cannot wish for better Evidence to build our Faith upon. And is it not great Arrogance in us, to limit the Sphear of God's Mercy by our own narrow Imagination?

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We neither know the extent of God's Power, nor the essence of our own Nature. He that knows how to exercise his Reason truly, will neither take all Things for granted without Proof, nor doubt of all. For where the Nature of Things will bear a Demonstration, prudent Men will expect it; but when they depend upon the Credit of Testimony, or are above their Comprehension, they submit to them, tho' there be no such sort of Evidence.

It is Wisdom here to avoid the extreme on both sides. For he that takes all upon Trust, makes no use of his Judgment: And he who doubts of all that is not demonstrated, either believes his understanding Infinite, and that it can comprehend all Truths, which is most False and Absurd; or else he is not aware, that some plain Truths are of such a kind, that they cannot admit a strict Demonstration.

And if we apply this to our Holy Religion, every Wise and unprejudiced Person will find, that there is as much evidence for it as the very Nature of the Things will bear, and more Proof for the Truth of the matters of Fact there recorded, than for any History besides in the whole World.

May we, like Wise Men, as well as good Christians, lay to heart, what so deeply concerns us; and no longer be cold, and indifferent, and trifle in the great Case between God and our own Souls: but let us make a better and safer Provision for our happy State in an amazing and un-

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circumscribed Eternity, than for our Subsistence a few Days or Years upon Earth.

Since God has put us Rebels into a better Condition than we could have hoped, or so much as wish'd for ; let us not be wanting on our side in the returns of Praise and Duty.

Since our Great Lord, sitting upon his Throne in Heaven, does pour forth his Blessings without Measure and Bounds upon all his Creatures, filling the whole World with the Fruits of his Goodness : May we ever Love, ever serve him, and Night and Day thankfully acknowledge his wond'rous and unspeakable Mercies.



SERMON III.

PSALM XXII. 25.

*My Praise shall be of thee in the great
Congregation: I will pay my Vows before
them that fear him.*

THE Title of this Psalm does shew that
it was written by *David*; and in it a
rehearsal is made of his Troubles, and
of God's delivering him out of them:
But being inspired with the Gift of Prophecy,
what he says of his own Afflictions, does most
exactly agree with the Sufferings of our Saviour
Jesus Christ.

Nay, so far as we can judge by the account
we have of both their Lives; some Things here
spoken did not befall *David*, which are adapted
to, and nicely fit the Circumstances of the Sor-
rows and Persecutions of our Lord. This
might be made clear by a Consideration of Par-
ticulars,

particulars, was there time, or did the design of my present Discourse lead me to it.

In the very beginning of the Psalm, David heavily complains that God had forsaken him in his Distress; he had cryed loud and earnestly, both in the Day Time and Night Season, unto God, but he heard not, and was far from his Help.

So that notwithstanding the fervent Importunity of his Prayers, and his steady Perseverance in his Duty; he was not yet freed from his Calamity, nor found any increase of support in his Soul to bear it.

But the sad Apprehensions the good King had of his own afflicted State, did not betray him into any Sin; he neither harbours ill Thoughts of God in his Heart, nor withdraws his Dependance upon him; he was Conscious such Defects might attend his Prayers, as should make it reasonable for God not yet to answer them; and therefore he does not, like impatient and unthinking Men, break loose from the Exercise of his Duty. But in the third Verse declares the Holiness of God; *but thou art Holy, O! thou that inhabitest the Praises of Israel.* He makes a full acknowledgment of the Justice, Grace, and Mercy of God's dealings with Men, for which they that are good do constantly Praise him in the places set apart for his Worship, which be the Habitation where in a more especial manner he doth dwell.

He further observes, how constant and uniform the Methods of divine Providence had been in all Times; Our Fathers trusted in thee, they trusted

trusted, and thou didst deliver them; *i. e.* It has been ever the course of Holy Men, humbly to apply themselves by Prayer to God in their Troubles, and to depend upon his Goodness for a Deliverance; and God always has graciously heard them, and in the fittest Season; and in ways suitable to their Condition, has rescued them out of their Misery.

And having summed up the Afflictions which had or did still press hard on himself; and also prophetically and particularly described the sufferings which were to be undergone by the Lord Jesus; upon a review, he does solemnly profess, that it is his fix'd Resolution to worship, praise, and adore God.

My praise shall be of thee in the great Congregation; I will pay my Vows before them that fear him.

My design from these Words is to shew the necessity of the publick Worship of God, and to represent the great Benefits and Blessings we may expect from praying to God, and giving Thanks to him in religious Assemblies [where in great Bodies Men meet on purpose for his Service:]

According to the Example of *David*, who being freed from terrible Dangers, did not content himself, either with returning Thanks to God secretly in his Closet, or privately in his Family; but he renders Praises to him in the great Congregation, in that Sacred Place, where the largest Numbers of the People were gather'd together to celebrate the Divine Goodness and Mercy.

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But before further Progress is made in this Argument, I would lay down by way of Precaution, that nothing which I shall say, is intended to lessen our Value and Esteem of secret and Family Prayers, and daily Performance of both, which are absolutely necessary for the Christian Man; for the publick Service, and private Devotions, have such dependence upon, and relation one to another, that if we neglect either of them, we cannot do the other so well as we ought to do.

For true Devotion in our Closets will dispose us to hearty Prayer in our Families; and the serving God in our Families, will make us very earnest to Worship him reverently in publick, and to have an awful Regard of him in his own House.

But if a Man has so little care and concern for the welfare of his Immortal Soul, as scarce to put up to God a serious Prayer during the whole Week, he is not like to do any act of Religion worthily and acceptably upon the Lord's-Day: For in such a stupid and listless Temper of Mind, as to Spiritual Affairs, and in such Ignorance of the State of the Case between God and himself, he will neither know what Helps to pray for, nor what Temptations to pray against. Thus, if we have no Sense of Religion at Home, we shall only put on the Form of Religion in the Church; which will not please God, nor have any Power and Influence on our Lives.

Moreover, we may observe, that we all oftner have just Occasions to Pray, than we have Opportunities

portunities to appear before God in publick ; and we must have but faint desires to become Partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven, if we content our selves with making Addresses to God, only when we go to his House, who every Day and Hour stand in need of his Mercy and Favour : Seeing every Motion in our Mind to do evil, ought immediately to be opposed by Prayer and Resolutions against it ; and every Inclination to do good, ought to be cherish'd by begging help, without delay, of God to promote it : Seeing every slip or sudden Surprize into a Sin ought to be lamented, and to have Pardon ask'd presently for it ; and every Blessing and unexpected Mercy deserves to have thanks forthwith return'd to the Author thereof.

But here the shortest Prayers will be graciously heard, provided they be accompanied with Sincerity and Affection ; *1 Tim. 2. 8. I will that men pray every where*, i. e. in all Times and Places as there is occasion. Infomuch, that the Blessings of God we continually receive, and the Divine Assistance we constantly want ; and the Forgiveness of our numberless Transgressions, which we should always importunately solicit ; do prove the frequency of private Devotions to be absolutely necessary.

I might add this more in behalf of secret Prayer, that where we are alone in the Presence of God, it is our Duty to confess all our particular Sins, with all the aggravating Circumstances that did attend them ; so far as our Memories will serve ; for hereby we shall be more fully convinced of the greatness of our Guilt, and become more
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ashamed of the Folly of our Sins, so heinous in their Circumstances, and so large in their Numbers; This will shew us the Danger of abiding in a State of Impenitence: This will render us more sensible of the want of the Pardon of God, and more desirous of it, and more grateful to him for his Mercy. Whereas a general Confession of Sin is only proper and requisite to be made by the Congregation, which indeed every Person may secretly apply to the Circumstances of his own Condition.

It is true, that when the particular Sins of Men break out, and the Enormity of them does give great Offence to the Church of God; it may be fit they should confess them before the Congregation, and declare their Sorrow for them, according to the constant Practice and Discipline of the Primitive Times, that the Satisfaction they shall make may be as publick as the Scandal they have given.

But here let it be noted, that what we have said of the necessity of a particular Confession of our Sins to God in secret, will not excuse the Guides of Conscience in the *Roman Church*, who put so many nice Questions to their Penitents, in order to their having Absolution, that they have often been found to instruct Persons of no bad Life in the Mysteries of Iniquity, and have discovered to them many Crimes of which before they had no Knowledge. And so in effect have taught them how they might be more wicked than they ever could have been, without such pernicious Information.

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I now proceed to my chief Argument, which is to lay before you Reasons and Considerations, from which will appear how great Obligation we have to join with the Congregation assembled, to offer up to God Prayers and Thanksgivings; and what Comfort and Spiritual Advantage we may hope for, by our humble Attendance upon God in his own House.

(I.) Publick Prayer is one of the most solemn Acts of Honour we can render to God; for by meeting devoutly together to worship God, we manifest unto the World the deep Esteem we have of his most excellent Nature; hereby we give full Testimony of the honourable Opinion we have settled in our Minds of his Power, Wisdom, and Goodness.

By imploring his Help on all Occasions, we declare our Belief of his Almighty Power, which can do all things possible, and which nothing can resist.

By begging Directions and Guidance of God in all matters of Difficulty, concerning our selves and others; we own his unsearchable Wisdom, from which not any such Design or Contrivance can lie hid.

By trusting our Souls, and Bodies, and Affairs with him; By humbly relying on him, when none else can aid or deliver us: By earnestly praying his Pardon for having broken his Holy Laws; we profess it is our firm Persuasion, that God is infinitely Good, and Gracious, and Merciful,

Merciful, and never weary of shewing Kindness to them that love and serve him.

But as the acknowledgment of Power, Goodness, and Wisdom in any Being, are true Marks and Signs of our Honour, Reverence, and Esteem of it; so the more constantly and more publicly we Admire, Praise, and Magnify those Perfections of the Divine Nature, we shall carry the Acts of our Honour and Esteem the higher, and make them more valuable, by their growing more acceptable to God, and more useful to Men; who by our Holy Examples will be induced to imitate us in publick Acts of Piety and Religion.

It is not easy to conceive how we should better Evidence the profound Veneration we have for God, than in great Assemblies to fall humbly upon our Knees before him; and to recognize his Sovereignty and Dominion over us; provided there be an Agreement between the Affections of our Mind, and the Behaviour of our Body; and these Acts of Worship do not begin from our Lips, but are fixed and rooted in our Hearts.

Upon the whole, we may conclude it to be our Duty, so long to join with the Congregation in all Acts of Divine Service, as we have strict Obligations upon us, to reverence and honour God, and to entertain worthy Thoughts of him; but from such Obligations can never be discharged, while Goodness and Power continue inseparable from his Nature, and Want and Weakness from ours; and while we receive all our

Enjoyments at his Hands, and while in him we Live, Move, and have our Being.

Insomuch, that if we duly and carefully employ our Thoughts upon the entirely perfect Nature of God, which did necessarily exist from Eternity, and is without possibility of Limitation from any Bounds, infinite and immense; surpassing, beyond Comparison, all other Things; and if also we deliberately consider, that this perfect Being is our Sovereign Lord, and great Benefactor, who advanced us in that Noble Rank of Creaturs, which in a peculiar Manner bear his Glorious Image; we shall be so far from omitting to do such Actions, as may testify our Honour, our Fear, our Love of God; that in his Dwelling, we shall Pray with Earnestness and Humility; we shall hear his Word with Attention and Concern; and partake of the Lord's Supper, with Devotion and Thankfulness.

With this Sense in his Soul of God's excellent Greatness, the Psalmist used to approach his Presence. *For who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the Saints: and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.* Psal. 89. 6, 7.

(2.) Consider that there be divers Blessings of God, which have Influence upon great Numbers; and that where Many have shares of a Favour, they are bound to join together in paying God Thanks for it:

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It being just and natural, that there should be some Proportion, or at least resemblance, between the good received, and the grateful Acknowledgment made thereof.

Publick Benefits which extend to whole Kingdoms and Nations, are some of them of a spiritual Nature; as when by divine Providence Men dwell in Countries, where all the Doctrines of true Religion and Virtue are Taught, without the Addition of Opinions repugnant to the Attributes and Perfections of God, and opposite to the clear Reason of Men; and where with decency and order God is worshipped in Spirit and Truth, and his Holy Service preserved pure from the unprofitable and dangerous Mixture of Superstition and Idolatry.

Again, some publick Blessings have relation to the Civil State of Kingdoms or Countries, where the Inhabitants are so Happy as to be under Governments, which are aptly framed for the Preservation of their Lives, and Goods, and Liberties; and to be protected in their Rights, by Religious, Wise, and Virtuous Governors. Others of God's general Favours concern the natural and inanimate Things, which contribute to the preservation of Life; such are wholesome Air, healthy Seasons, temperate Heat and Cold, plentiful Harvests.

Now these are publick and standing Instances of God's Bounty, and enjoyed by Men in common, and therefore require a common and united Return of Thanksgiving and Praise.

And tho' it cannot be, that all Persons who receive Advantage by them, should meet together in one Body to magnify the Lord; yet in every Place so many should assemble, as be able, to partake of the Divine Offices, without falling into disorder and confusion.

But we may further observe, that as there are true Causes and Occasions for general Thanksgivings, so there may be just Motives and Reasons for publick Fasts and Humiliations.

For if the long Enjoyment of God's Mercies make Men forget from whence they receiv'd them, and to have no regard to the Terms and Conditions on which they hold them, may not he justly threaten to take them away?

May not God remove the Light of the Gospel, against which Men willfully shut their Eyes, not suffering it to have any Power over their Minds and Manners?

May not he make their Enemies to rise against them, and subvert their well-constituted Government; and corrupt the Air they Breath, and destroy the Fruits of the Earth with Storms and Tempests, Blasts, and Mildew? And when Men are either terrify'd with the Danger of any of these great Judgments, or feel the intense Pain of them; be they not bound in Wisdom, in Duty, in Interest, not only every one personally to grieve alone for his Offence against the Divine Majesty, but in the most solemn and publick manner to Weep, Fast, and humble themselves, and pour forth their Souls before God in Prayer, in deprecations of his Displeasure, and in

in promising and endeavouring hearty and serious Reformation?

So likewise upon a general Humiliation, when God of his infinite Mercy shall have amply supplied publick Losses, and removed general Calamities, or the Danger and Fears of them, and shall restore or establish Religion, Peace, Health, and Plenty: Then Acts of Praise and Thanksgiving ought to be put forth in as publick Instances, as the Fasts and Humiliations had been.

It appearing manifest, that as particular Favours to private Men, are reasons which bind them to worship God apart; so publick Mercies are the ground of publick Worship, where God is considered as an Universal Father and Patron, and the Author of all the Happiness we now possess, or may hereafter expect.

(3.) Another Motive to partake of the publick Prayers may be this, That the wicked may have such help from the Prayers of the Holy Men with whom they join, as they had no reason to hope for from their own.

Sinners often fare the better for the Righteous dwelling among them, for whose Sake God has made Families, and Cities, and whole Nations to flourish: We all know God would have spared the Inhabitants of *Sodom*, could Ten Religious Persons have been found among them.

And surely Sinners can never have ground to expect more of the Divine Favour, for being in the Company of the Righteous, than when they unite with them in setting forth the

Praises of the Almighty, for his Goodness to the Children of Men.

God often has given Peace to a Land, that was harrassed with the Miseries of War : or has stopped the Hand of his Angel, who was visiting them with the Plague; not moved with the loud Cries of prophane and dissolute Men ; but thro' the ardent Importunity and Intercession of his faithful Servants, with whom they were assembled.

Add further, that Sinners by frequenting the Temple of the Lord, do take the way of his own appointment to reclaim themselves : And that their often appearing in Places separated for the Service of God, will, if they have any Wife and Serious Thoughts, restrain them by degrees from being Wicked.

And he, who does not go to Church upon a Principle of Religion, may either be affected with the sincere Devotion of others, or have some Portion of the Word of God so directly pressed upon him, and so pertinently applied to his own Condition, as may awaken him out of his ill-grounded Security, and make him very solicitous to find and use the Means necessary to Salvation.

(4.) Forasmuch as it cannot be denied, that those who wilfully absent themselves from Religious Assemblies, do as far as in them lies put an end to the publick Worship and Service of God, and intimate the continuance of them to be useless in the World, which were ordained to sustain

sustain and preserve the Honour, Love, Fear, and Reverence of the Lord:

We will briefly represent the dangerous and fatal Consequences of laying aside the Publick Service.

In this Case, all the remainders of the Face of Religion must appear in particular Families; and it would be no hard matter to foretel how the Visage and Countenance of Religion would be altered and deformed, was God only to be adored, and his Word expounded in private Houses.

Many Masters of Families are so far from Understanding, that they cannot Read the Holy Scriptures, which contain the Will of God, and the Means of Salvation: And many that can Read, have shallow and weak Understandings, and are not capable of instructing their Children in the necessary Duties of Religion and Virtue; that all under their Roof are like to be bred up in thick Ignorance.

Others are of a stupid, sluggish, and listless Temper, who rarely employ their Thoughts about any matter but at a little distance, much less concerning a future State, and how they shall fare in the next World. And you cannot in Reason suppose, that they will have any regard to the Souls of their Children and Servants, who take no care of their own.

Some Men have melancholy and timorous Constitutions; they represent God as terrible, angry, and scarce placable; and instead of teaching the sober, rational, and Holy Rules of worshipping him,

him, they would introduce vain, foolish, and superstitious Practices, and hope to pacify him by what is very unagreeable, either for him to accept, or for us to offer.

There be also Men of fierce and Enthusiastick Spirits, who pushed on with a dark and furious Zeal, have destroy'd their Neighbours Goods, and depriv'd them of their Lives, with intention by such monstrous Immoralities to advance the Glory of God.

We may add to these, such as viewing the Gentleness and Mercy of God, separated from his Justice, do hope by the shortest and slightest Penances, to obtain Reconciliation with him.

But what would be most frightful in such a sad Scene of things, is the great number of the Heads of Families, who are Prophane and Lewd, and have given up themselves to their Luffs and Passions. How deplorable would the Case be of those unhappy Persons, who must rely on them alone for Guides in the way to Heaven!

It would be better, with respect to their Souls, that the Members of such Families were set at a distance from their Heads or Rulers; who by their contagious Example, might damp their natural Dispositions to Virtue and Honesty, without giving any hopes to instruct them how they should become wiser and better.

Hence it would follow, that some Families would not be taught their Duty to God and their Neighbour at all; some would be but very slenderly and imperfectly made acquainted with the Laws of God; others would have false and mean Notions,

Notions, altogether unworthy of an infinitely perfect Being, convey'd into their Minds, for the right Principles of Religion; and others would have such Persuasions instilled into them, as favour Vice, and encourage them to entertain it.

The most absurd Opinions would become Articles of some Mens Creed, and the most impious Practices might be reconciled with the Rules and Religion others would teach.

Every House almost, in a short time, would have a Religion of its own; the different Opinions about God, and the ways of his Worship, would equal in number the Families therein. So that Mankind would split into prodigiously far more Sects than there be already, and all these would be dividing and subdividing till they crumbled away.

I would but observe further on this Head, that by the same pretended Arguments they would put down the worship of God in Churches, they may lay it aside in their own Houses, and reduce it to the Closet; nay, I fear, by Consequence, drive it from the Closet out of the World.

For if many Men are not bound publickly to be thankful for a Benefit which affects them all; why should a less number of Men be obliged to acknowledge a smaller Kindness in which they share? And if the least number be not engaged to return Thanks together for a common Favour, what can tye single Men to be grateful apart for the personal Mercies they have received from Heaven? For if they can think themselves not bound to make joynt Acknowledgments with others

others, of God's Power and Goodness; they quickly will find Pretences to absolve themselves from paying to God the Tributes of Praise and Thanksgiving, when they shall be in the secret Places where no Eye sees them.

How harmless a matter therefore soever it may seem to some Men, customarily to absent themselves from the Publick Worship of God; and how plausible soever their Excuses for it may appear to themselves; yet we have cause to apprehend, if they be traced thro' all their Consequences to the Head, that in all likelihood they will banish Religion, and end in Atheism. Nay, tho' it was admitted, that the Obligations to secret Devotion were in force, yet that would not answer the End of Religion, which was ordained to sustain and uphold the Honour of God in the World.

As Publick Worship is a plain and just Due to God for all his Benefits; so, as far as can be discover'd, it began with the World, and has been transmitted thro' all Times, and maintained in all Countries. Men have hardly gone more universally into the Belief that there is a God, than that publick Honour and Respect is to be rendred to him.

They have always reckon'd the Worship of God among the Laws of Nature, and have not agreed in the owning any one Law more generally than this. So that it must be the Voice and Dictate of Nature, rooted in our Souls by the God of Nature. For the same Arguments which convince us that there is a God who made
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and governs the World, and takes a particular care of Men, do as fully prove that all his Creatures, but we more especially, should glorify and adore him.

But none have been more constant in the discharge of these great Duties, than the People who, in a more immediate manner, were govern'd and directed by God; the Patriarchs and good Men before the Law, and the *Jews* under it.

Abraham on all Occasions erects Altars, offers Sacrifice, and prostrates himself before God in Testimony of the Greatness of his Power, and of the many Gifts he had freely bestow'd upon him. The *Jews*, by the Commandment of God, did consecrate a Seventh Part of their Time to the Honour and Service of God; and a great deal of the remainder of it was employ'd about his Publick Worship, and that by his Order, and with signal Marks of his Approbation, *Isa. 6. 3.*

We come now to consider how God order'd the Worship of the Christian Church by Jesus Christ.

(5.) The very End of our Saviour's Institution does suppose Publick Worship; for it was his Business to gather a Body of Men out of all the World, who should unite in the Profession of the Religion he would set up, by being baptized into his Name, embracing his Doctrines, practising his Precepts, trusting to his Promises, and by partaking together of a Holy Feast of his Appointment, and in memory of himself. Now Christ calls this body of Men his Church, of which he is the Head, and they the Members:

But how can this Body subsist and live without an Union among the Members thereof? And how can there be such Union, if there are not some visible Acts to testify their Relation one to another; and if they have no Communion in the Praises and Prayers offer'd up to God?

By Baptism we are let into the Church; and by worthy Receiving together of the Lord's Supper, Life and Vigor are preserved in this Society; and Charity, and mutual Kindness, and universal Good-will are maintained. It does deserve notice, that almost all the Promises Christ made to his Disciples, had relation to his Church. He promises them great help, even the assistance of the Holy Ghost; but it was chiefly to plant, to direct, to support, and to enlarge his Church.

Accordingly, when they desired him to teach them to Pray, he gave them a Form of Prayer, in which they were to join together; every Petition being in the Plural Number: So that from the Words and Model of our Lord's own Prayer, we learn, that it is our Duty frequently to join in putting up Prayers to our common Father and Lord, which is in Heaven.

(6.) We gather the Acceptableness of publick Prayers, from the great Encouragement our Lord has given his Followers to join in them. He promises, that those Petitions shall meet a favourable reception with God, which humble and innocent Men have agreed to put up to him. *That if two of them shall agree on Earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be*

be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. Mat. 18. 19.

And if the least Number agree to ask what is fit and proper for them to receive, it shall be granted.

And our Saviour farther declares, *That where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them.* ver. 20.

And if special Assistance is promised to a few met together to Pray, what Help may not full Assemblies hope for, who with profound Reverence, and sincere Affection, jointly confess their Sins, implore the Divine Grace, and loudly testify the thankfulness of their Hearts for the Goodness of the Lord.

To humble Petitioners, who have so strongly united their Holy Desires, God will vouchsafe greater Blessings, and them also more speedily.

This must be the Judgment of St. Paul, who in his great wants and difficulties does sollicite the Prayers of the Church. *Now I beseech you brethren in your Prayers to God for me,* Rom. 15. And 2 Cor. 1, *you also helping together by Prayer for us.*

He, we see, was fully perswaded of the prevailing Power which the Intercessions of the Congregation would have with God.

That this was the Sense also of the Primitive Christians, we may fairly conclude, because they often met together to Pray, with the hazard of their Lives; But if they had believed, either that it was not their Duty to join in Prayers with the Church, or that their separate Prayers would have

have been of as much Force in Heaven ; certainly they would not so often have exposed their Lives without any necessity.

We are informed, that in the early Ages of Christianity, Prayers were celebrated in most Places about the same Times of Day ; so that the Religious Assemblies of all Countries might offer up to God their Devotions together, and as it were with a Holy Violence, storm Heaven for relief of the necessities of the Church ; And some Ancients also are of Opinion, that at the same time the Saints prayed on Earth, the Angels glorified God in Heaven ; so that he might be worshipped by all his reasonable Creatures at once.

But (*Lastly,*) reflect how much the Devotions of Men may be increased by their joining together in Prayer ; for Men cannot join in any Enterprize, without giving warmth to their Spirits, and pushing farther than their natural Temper would have carried them alone.

We cannot behold Men on their Knees in most humble manner confessing their Crimes, and abhorring their Vileness and Ingratitude, without feeling our Hearts rise against our own Sins, and without praying earnestly against them.

We cannot hear Men send up their Thanks to Heaven for God's Mercies, and not call to remembrance all the wonderful Things he has done for our Souls. Who can stand in the midst of those who utter forth the Praises of God with a joyful Noise, and not find himself disposed

fed to Bless the Lord for all the peculiar and remarkable Favours shewn to his own Person?

Can any thing fill a Pious Man's Heart more with Joy, than to behold multitudes of his Fellow-Creatures declare openly the grateful Sense they have of the Patience, and Long-suffering, and Loving-Kindness of God that made them, and of Christ who redeem'd them with his own Blood?

Who can see many Tears shed at the Table of the Lord, and not have his Heart moved with Thoughts of the Sufferings of his Saviour, who underwent so much Shame and Cruelty to ransom him from Eternal Death?

So that admitting you could raise your Soul to the highest pitch of Devotion in your Retirements; yet what passes there, will be only between God and your selves: Whereas your pious and discreet Zeal in the House of God, may excite the Devotion of others; and by your good Example, you may become an useful Instrument to convert Souls to God.

But I end; and shall enforce all with this Observation, That the Saints in Heaven, in their exalted State, do Worship and Glorify God together. Our Lord tells us what Joy there is in that Holy Place at the Conversion of a single Sinner; and surely much more must they Croud together, and exalt the Name of God, when they contemplate his infinite Love made manifest in the Redemption of Mankind.

And they are the Words of his most beloved Disciple, with which I conclude. *The twenty*

four Elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created. Rev. 4. 10, 11.

After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb. And the Angels stood round about the Throne, and the Elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the Throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and Might be unto God for ever and ever. Amen. Rev. 7. 9, 10, 11, 12.

SER.

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SERMON IV.

EPH. IV. 30.

*And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,
whereby ye are sealed unto the day of
redemption.*

IN the beginning of this Epistle to the
Ephesians, St. Paul sets forth the won-
derful Love of God, in converting
them from the Idolatry and magical
Arts to which they were so much addicted, un-
to the Religion of his Son Jesus Christ, who had
redeem'd them thro' his Blood, and forgiven
their Sins according to the Riches of his Grace.

This was an invaluable Favour of God, both
with respect of the miserable Condition out of
which he did take them, when they were desti-
tute of all Power to rescue themselves, and with-
out hope of being relieved by any other; and
also of the glorious State unto which he advanced
them, whom he had quickned when they were
dead

dead in Sins and Trespases, by the Grace of the Gospel; and would thereby prepare and qualify them to rise up to a Life immortal, and to sit together in heavenly Places with Jesus Christ.

But the Holy Apostle having penetrated deep, and made some discovery to them of the great Mystery of God's Wisdom and Love contained in the Gospel; he betakes himself to his Prayers, and is earnest with God on their behalf; that he would finish in them the good Work his Grace had begun; that he would enlighten the Eyes of their Understanding, and give them the Spirit of Knowledge, that they might discern the exceeding Greatness of his Power towards them that believe, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the Dead; and thereupon firmly ground the Hopes of their own Resurrection.

After his Prayers plentifully poured forth for the *Ephesians*, he does address himself to them in a serious Exhortation, that they would *walk worthy of their high calling, and live as became the professors of the Gospel of Christ.*

And at length he is more particular, and does proceed to give them divers Precepts and Rules of Holy Living, mingled with Dissuasives from the Vices that are opposite to those Graces and Virtues which he did recommend. But because they neither could do those Duties which were commanded, nor avoid those Sins which were forbidden, without they had access by the Spirit to the Father for his Gracious Assistance, he gives them great Caution not to offend this blessed Spirit.

And

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of Redemption.

In treating of this Argument, I will

(1.) Give a short Account of the Meaning of the Words.

(2.) I will consider the Extent and Benefit of the Work of the Holy Ghost, here represented by *sealing*.

(3.) I will lay down the Particulars, wherein the Sin of *grieving the Holy Spirit* does consist.

(4.) Shew how the Sin of *grieving the Holy Spirit* does differ from the Sin or Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

(5.) I will endeavour to rectify the Mistakes and Errors concerning these Matters, which have been the occasion of some Mens Presumption, and have run others into Despair.

(1.) I am to give a short Account of the meaning of the words. By the *Holy Spirit* we are to understand the Third Person in the Trinity.

And here we may observe, That altho' the Third Person of the Trinity is in the Scripture more eminently and frequently called the Spirit; yet that the Father and the Son are both Spirits, *i. e.* spiritual and uncompounded Substances, free from and void of all corporeal Extension, that does involve Divisibility and Corruption, which is utterly repugnant to the infinite Perfection of their Nature.

And further, as he is not stiled the Spirit, in opposition to the Father and the Son; so neither

is he called Holy to distinguish him from them ; as if Holiness was more essential to him, or that he did possess it in greater measure and degree ; For all the Three Persons are essentially and infinitely Holy.

Holiness therefore seems in the Word of God to be attributed to the Third Person, not only to denote the incorrupted Purity of his Glorious Essence, but principally to signify the Quality of his Office under the Dispensation of the Gospel ; in which the Father appears as the Author and Contriver of our Salvation ; the Son, as our Redeemer from Sin and Misery ; and the Holy Ghost as our Sanctifier, who renews our Nature, and produces all those Holy Dispositions in our Minds, which prepare us for the Mercies of God, purchased for us Sinners by the Blood of Christ.

And now it may be proper to consider, how we are to understand the Operation of the *Holy Spirit*, which is here express'd by sealing ; which in a large Sense taken, may comprehend the whole of his Office.

Of a Seal there are several Uses in the Affairs of Life ; A Seal is set to a Writing, either to testify the Truth of the things contained in it ; or as an Obligation upon him who applies it to the written Instrument, to transfer some Right, to perform some Covenant.

Seals also are put upon *Things*. When Merchants have bought Goods, they often set their Seal or Mark upon them, to distinguish their own Purchase from others,

And

And in the *Eastern* Countries, *Men* were exposed in the Market to Sale like other Creatures; and the Buyer did usually mark those in the Forehead with his Seal, whom he did buy.

So that a Seal is chiefly employ'd, either as an Evidence of Truth, or as a Mark of Property. It is intended for to manifest the Truth, when it is affix'd to Testimonial or Credential Letters: And it is a Mark or Token of Right and Property, either when it is put upon Things bought, or when it is joined to obligatory Writings, which convey something from one Man to another.

Now the Operations of the Holy Spirit may fitly be represented by sealing, taken in these several Senses. For the many Miracles which he wrought, were so many unquestionable Marks and Evidences of the Truth of the Christian Religion in general; and the Graces which he infused into particular Men, when he made them Temples, and consecrated them for his own Habitation, were so many Tokens of his Right and Property in them, and so many Seals or Assurances to them, that he would abide with them, and support and preserve them unto the Day of Redemption, *i. e.* unto the Time when he would Redeem them from all the Dangers and Troubles of the present State, and put them in Possession of an infinitely Happy and Eternal Life in the Heavens.

But of this more largely under the next Head, when I come to discourse of the *Extent* and Advantage of this Work of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, We are to endeavour to explain, what it is to grieve the Holy Spirit. Grief is that Indisposition, which proceeds, either from the loss of some Good, or the approach of some Evil, which does sink and abate the Motion of the Animal Spirit. Wherefore, properly speaking, the Holy Ghost cannot be grieved.

Our most obstinate Resistance of his Gracious Suggestions cannot interrupt his Peace, nor our exactest Obedience increase his Happiness, who is in himself absolutely and compleatly perfect; and it is impossible, that what is so, should admit of Augmentation or Diminution in its Perfections.

The Passion therefore of Greif is attributed to the Spirit of God, to shew the utter unagreeableness of Evil to the Purity of his Nature, which can no more be reconciled to persevering Sinners, than Light and Darkness dwell together. Therefore, when the Holy Ghost is said to be grieved, we must not imagine any Change to be wrought in him, but in our selves.

For he that is capable of no Grief, will treat us as if he was really Grieved. *i. e.* we shall find in our selves the Effects of his Displeasure; for he will forsake our Souls which were his Habitation, and withdraw his kind Influences, which were the Cause of our inward Tranquility, and of the joyful Assurances we had of future Happiness.

Thus God in Condescension to our slow and narrow Understanding, is pleased sometimes to assume the Passions of our Mind, and sometimes

sometimes to ascribe to himself the Parts of our Body ; he sometimes seems to be angry, to convince us of the Abhorrence he has of all Wickedness ; and sometimes to be grieved, to make us more sensible that he has no delight in the Death of a Sinner, and how loth he is any of us should neglect the Offers and the Day of his Grace, and perish in our Iniquities.

Sometimes also he is said to have a Heart, which is the Principle and Spring of all vital Motion, to manifest his Love and Affection for us; an Arm, and a Hand, to declare his Almighty Power ; Eyes to shew his Providence, that he knows all Things and Actions, and does kindly superintend all his Creatures ; and Ears to assure us of his readiness to hear our Prayers, and to supply our Wants, and to deliver us out of Trouble.

But to prevent any ones falling into the old Heresy of asserting God to have Humane Shape, I will take leave briefly to note.

(1.) That neither the Passions of the Mind, nor the Parts of the Body are affirmed of God, but when he is dealing and treating with Men ; and are not designed to discover, wherein his Nature does consist, but to enable us more easily and plainly to understand his Will.

(2.) That not all, but only the more noble Parts of the Body, are in Scripture ascribed to God ; such as are the Fountains and Causes of Motion and Action.

(3.) That

(3.) That notwithstanding he is said to have some of the Parts of the Body; yet such Qualities are declared to belong to them, as cannot be inherent to Matter. The Scripture which speaks of Gods Eyes, does also teach us, that with them he does discern all the secret Intentions and Designs in the Heart of Man, which can be no Property of material Eyes. So likewise, that with his Ears he does hear the Requests of Men in all parts of the World, and all together at the same time: Nay, does discover our Desires, before we have utter'd them with our Lips; does as fully perceive all our Wishes, and all our Fears, while they are conceived and closely lodged in our Thoughts, as when they break forth, and are exprest by our Words.

(4.) That when the Design of the Scripture is to give some Description of the Divine Nature, God is declared to be a Spirit, to be Eternal and Invisible, and that none have or can see him; and all the Appearances there mentioned of him are to be understood, either of the Angels sent in his Name, who speak as if it was God himself, or of the seeing of Jesus Christ in his Humane Person at the Day of Judgment.

But we cannot but observe, that this great Condescension of God, for the help of our weak Apprehensions, will not justify the Practice of them of another Communion, who seem neither to have had a due Care, nor a just Zeal, to uphold in Men right Notions of the Simplicity and Spirituality of the Divine Nature, while they

they permit the Almighty and Invisible God himself to be represented by Pictures and Graven Images, which is the ready way to cause in the common People the meanest and most absurd Conceptions of him, and to lead them into the Guilt of the grossest Idolatry.

(2.) We are to consider the *Extent* and Benefit of the Work of the Holy Spirit, here set forth by Sealing.

Sealing may be understood of the Operations of the Holy Ghost, either with respect of the Christian Religion in General, and of the whole Body or Church of Christ; or with regard to particular Christians, and those Spiritual Advantages which they receive within the Communion thereof.

In respect of Religion in general, he did work divers Miracles, which were to be as so many Tokens from Heaven, or Seals of the Truth of the Christian Religion.

When a new Religion is to be planted and spread over the World, it is necessary that the Preacher, by some miraculous Work, should convince Men that he hath his Commission from God, and that the Doctrines he preaches are by his Commandment, and agreeable to his Will. There is no reason to believe a Stranger meerly upon his own Word, especially in matters of Moment and Consequence, and where, if he be a Deceiver, Men by an easy Credulity may be betrayed into such Dangers and Mischiefs, as from which they hardly can deliver themselves.

So

So where he brings along with him Authentick Testimonies of his Character, and the Truth of his Message; it would be want of Wisdom not to receive him, and to give due Attendance to what he shall say.

If therefore a Man pretends he has something to publish to the World, which was revealed to him by God; he ought to give satisfactory Proof of the Truth of the Revelation, *i. e.* produce some Seal or Mark of his being the Messenger of God; and when he has given Evidence of his Authority, by doing some Work which can only be brought to pass by the Power of God, it will be at the Peril of them that see and hear him, not to give Credit to what he says.

Accordingly, our Blessed Saviour, both to demonstrate his Divine Character and Authority, and to prove the Truth of his Doctrines, did begin the Administration of his great Prophetick Office with Glorious Miracles; at his Baptism the Heavens were opened unto him, the Spirit descended like a Dove, and lighted upon him; and a Voice from Heaven did testify, that he was the Beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased.

And as he began, so during the whole Course of his performing the Part of a Prophet, he made it his Work to reveal the last Will of God to the People, and to establish the Truth of what he Taught by Miracles. He went about all the Country, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven in their Synagogues, and

and healing all manner of Sickness, and all manner of Disease among the People.

It was indeed a great Argument both of the Goodness and Wisdom of our Blessed Lord, so to contrive his Miracles, that at the same time that they convinced Men of the necessity of Repentance, and did settle in their Minds a firm persuasion of the Truth and Excellency of his Religion; they did Cure the Maladies, and repair the Defects of their Bodies.

And when, having ended the Office of a Prophet, he entered upon that of a Priest, by offering himself on the Cross a Sacrifice to God, in Satisfaction for the Sins of all who had died in *Adam*; and did rise again the Third Day; he gave as clear a Demonstration, as firm an Evidence as was possible, to his Disciples, and to all that believe in him, of their own Resurrection.

That Spirit which did raise Christ out of the Grave, who is the Head of the Holy Catholick Church, did Seal an Assurance to all Devout Christians, who are Members of the same, that he would raise them too, and rejoin their Bodies and Souls never again to be separated, nor to taste any more of Death, but to dwell together in the glorious Mansions of the House of God for ever and ever.

Nor did Jesus Christ give more Ground of Satisfaction and Comfort to all true Believers by his rising from the Dead, than by his Ascending into Heaven; nor by his returning to Heaven, than by his sending the Holy Ghost,
after

after his return, to supply his Place, and to guide, and feed, and support his Church; for his Resurrection and Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, were all of them the Products of infinite Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness.

And the Apostles once filled with the Holy Ghost, did find Ability in themselves to preach the Word in Languages they never had learned; that Men of all Nations of the Earth, might become Partakers of the Mercies of the Gospel.

And such was the Goodness of God, that these wonderful Powers were not confined only to the Times and Persons of the Apostles; but the Belevers on whom they laid their Hands with Prayers, were replenished with the Gifts of the Holy Ghost; which were continued in the Successors of the Apostles, so long as the Spirit of God found it necessary, either for the Enlargement or the Preservation of his Church.

And St. Paul seems with a little more than ordinary Propriety to express the Powers of the Holy Ghost by *sealing*, in this Epistle to the *Ephesians*; since he himself Baptized them, in the name of the Lord Jesus; and when he laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied. So that St. Paul was the good Instrument, by which his Holy Seal and Assurance was impress'd on their Souls.

But from the Time these Supernatural Powers, no longer necessary to the Church, have ceased; the Holy Spirit does Minister such Helps to
Christ's

Christ's Flock, as are requisite for its present Condition, and suitable to its various Wants.

He is that Soul which communicates Life and Vigour to it, and leads it into all necessary Truth, and compacts all the Members thereof into one Body and one Holy Communion, and under so many Persecutions has holden them in the Profession of the one true Faith, uniting their Affections with fervent Love and Charity.

I proceed to speak of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit bestow'd upon *particular* Persons; and they are various according to the Condition of Men, either before their Conversion, or at the time of their Conversion, or in proportion to the Advances and Improvements they make in the Holy State.

He brings the Unconverted to a Knowledge of themselves, by keeping the World for some time out of their Thoughts, and shutting out the Objects of Sense which used to interrupt their serious Meditations; whereby they discover themselves to be in a bad condition, and that their great and manifold Iniquities have render'd them obnoxious to the Wrath of God; and that it is a Matter of the greatest Danger and ill Consequence to go on in this sinful Course. And this deliberation is the Effect of the preventing Grace of the Spirit: Which either will end, (if Men suffer the Cares of the World, and the Deceitfulness of Riches, or the Pleasures of the Flesh, to choke the growth of the Word) in hardness of Heart, and stupifying of Conscience, which may a little palliate the uneasiness and pain, but

not thoroughly remove it; Troubles and Sicknes commonly renewing the Gripes and Remorses of the Mind, and Death hardly ever failing to awaken the Conscience, and to fill it with Horror.

Or else it puts forth it self in serious Resolutions of Reformation; The Fear of God's dreadful Anger, temper'd with the hopes in his boundless Mercy, do win Men to Repentance; which cannot be sincere and effectual, without the Assistance of the Spirit, which is the Fruit of his concomitant Grace.

And according to the progress the true Penitent makes in a good Life, the Gifts of the Spirit increase in him, and render the Performance of his Holy Exercises more easy, and cause him to feel greater Satisfaction and Pleasure in them.

And this is agreeable to the Nature of the thing, and the constant Doctrine of the Scriptures. Thus our blessed Master, *He that hath been faithful over a few things, I will make him ruler over many things; and unto every man that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance,* Matth. 25. 28, 29. Again, *If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him,* John 14. 23.

God, and his Son Christ, will not reveal the Excellencies of their Nature, nor communicate the larger measures of their Grace, but to those that love them already, *i. e.* keep their Commandments. But upon the Love and Obedience of

of Men, the Father and Son will draw near to them, and make their abode with them, and the Holy Ghost will reside in them as Temples consecrated to his Honour and Service.

Wherefore the Abode and Indwellings of the Spirit, do import the readiness, the nearness, and the constancy of his Divine Assistance.

To instance but in another place of Scripture: Christ says, he was *come that we might have life, and that we might have it in abundance*, John 10. 10. *i. e.* not only to furnish all Men with the Means to perform the necessary Conditions of Salvation required in the Gospel, but to endue them who had improved the Talents wherewith they were already entrusted, with plentiful measures of the Spirit, even in such abundance as might give them a Seal, a Pledge, a Taste of the Glories and Joys of Heaven before they go thither.

Hence it appears, that the Holy Spirit does not vouchsafe to seal or dwell in any, but those who have improved his former Gifts; and that even these may grieve him by making a stop in their Religious Progress, or by relapsing into their old Courses.

(3.) I am to lay down the Particulars wherein the Sin of *grieving the Holy Spirit* does consist. But first I would here premise, that this Crime of *grieving the Holy Spirit*, has relation to his dwelling in us, and having made us his Temple; And therefore whatever would offend a good

and wise Guest, and is contrary to the Design of his coming *to us*, must *grieve the Holy Spirit*.

Things grievous to the Holy Ghost may, I conceive, be reduced to these Three Heads or Particulars.

(1.) An impure Habitation.

(2.) An unagrecable Temper and Disposition of Mind.

(3.) The flighting and disregarding his Counsel and Advice.

(1.) The *Holy Spirit will be grieved* by an impure Habitation. For this Blessed Spirit is essentially pure in his own Nature, and the Standard of all Purity; every thing having more or less of this excellent Quality, in proportion to the Degrees it does resemble him. And as fleshly Concupiscence is repugnant to the Nature of the Holy Ghost, and must be exceeding loathsome to him; so it is contrary to his great Design of dwelling with us, which was to purify to himself a People zealous of good Works.

In the Gospel, which is a System of the most exalted Morality that ever was communicated to the World, the Spirit has declared so utter an Abhorrence of all brutish Lusts, that he does not only forbid all the gross Acts of uncleanness, but restrains all filthy Desires; and has pronounced, that freely to indulge them, is to commit Adultery in the Heart.

These are Sins that darken the Understanding, pervert the Will, weaken the Judgment, and deface the Image of God impressed upon us. And

as they highly grieve and offend the Holy Ghost, and cause him speedily to forsake us; so hardly any Sins do more draw off our Love from God, and estrange and alienate our Affections from Religion and Virtue, and do sink us down immediately to a level with the brutish Creatures; inso-much that they both unfit and unqualify *us for the Kingdom of Heaven*, and will certainly shut us out of it. For *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind—shall inherit the Kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. 6. 9. And if any man defile the Temple of God, him will God destroy, 1 Cor. 3. 17. If any Man pollute and soil his Body, set apart for Holy Uses, with the Sins of the Flesh; the Divine Judgments will overtake and destroy him. For *whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*, i. e. will condemn them.

(2.) The *Holy Ghost* will be *grieved* by an unsuitable Temper and Disposition of Mind.

As it was the Intention of the Holy Ghost to preserve our Bodies from the defilements of Lust, so it was to raise and exalt the moral Perfections of our Mind, and to reduce our Inclinations and Affections all under subjection to our Religion and our Reason; so that in our Lives we might bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit, Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness.

But on the contrary, if we let our Affections get the mastery of our Reason, and suffer our

selves more to be govern'd by the Motions of our violent Passions, than by the Precepts of our Holy Religion ; this will minister matter of *grief* to the Spirit of God.

If we are Proud and Ambitious, and carry our selves with Haughtiness and Contempt towards our Brethren of low Rank ; if we are customarily peevish and out of humour, and not content with our Condition, nor pleased with the Portion allotted to us by the Providence of God ; if we are apt to be angry upon slight Occasions, and with every Body, and let neither Reason nor Time set Bounds to our Passion, but the Sun goes down in our Wrath ; if we are Malicious and Revengeful, and will not bear with them that offend us, nor forgive Injuries ; if we are Covetous, Selfish, and Unjust, and have not the Heart to do Good to others, nor to shew Pity and Compassion to the poor and distressed ; we shall trouble *the Holy Spirit*, and make him sorry that ever he did condescend to live with us.

(3.) The last Particular I shall mention which will *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, is to disregard and slight his Commands, Counsels and Advice.

The *Holy Spirit* will not vouchsafe to dwell in us under any other Capacity than that of a Governor and a Guide, to which Titles he has unquestionable Right, not only from our Creation, but from our Redemption ; it being by the virtue of his Grace, that we, who were dead

dead in Sins and Trespasses, shall be raised to Immortal Life.

And he is pleased to take his Habitation in us, not out of respect of any Advantage which can accrue to himself, but merely to do us good; the End of his coming being to guide us into all Truth, to possess our Souls with all Virtue, and to carry us through all Dangers.

Wherefore, if, when he puts good Thoughts into our Hearts, instead of cherishing them, we do all we can to stifle them, and run into Company to get rid of them: If when he presents us with fair Opportunities to promote the Glory of God, or to do good to Men, we stubbornly decline them, and follow the motion of our own Lusts: And if when secretly he intimates the Danger of coming near some particular Temptation, which formerly did betray us, we will notwithstanding again rush into its way; nothing can be expected, but that he being grieved, should desert our Souls, which he did enlighten and refresh, and, thus justly vexed, should turn to be our Enemy.

(4.) I am to shew how the Sin of *grieving the Holy Spirit* does differ from the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven.

To distinguish rightly between these Sins, we must observe, as we did before, that some Gifts of the Holy Ghost are bestow'd for the sake of others, and some for our own Improvement.

The Power of working Miracles was given for the Advantage of the whole Body of Christians that then were, or ever should be ; for it was to establish the Truth of the Christian Religion, and to propagate it in the World : But the ordinary Gifts of the Spirit, Purity, Meekness, Chastity, Temperance, and the like, Men chiefly receive for their own proper Benefit.

Now it was against these extraordinary Powers of the Spirit which were given for the good of the whole Church, that the Blasphemy or Sin against the Holy Ghost was committed : For our Lord had healed a Man that was possess'd with a Devil, and was blind and dumb ; upon which wonderful Cure all the People were amazed, and said, *Is not this the Son of David?* But the *Pharisees* said, *This fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.*

With the deepest Malice, and greatest Repugnancy to common Sense ; what only could be done by the Finger of God, and was contrary to the wicked devices of Satan, these *Pharisees* do attribute unto the Power of the Devil : And if it had been a work in the Devil's power, yet the Devil would not act against himself ; Satan would not oppose Satan, and help forward a Cure that was design'd for the Overthrow of his Kingdom of Darkness.

So that herein seems to lye the Blackness of this Sin, that it was committed in full opposition to the Gospel of Christ, which was to be the great Instrument of the Salvation of Mankind ;
and

and to destroy the clearest and strongest Proof which could possibly be given for the Truth thereof.

Whereas the Sin of *grieving the Holy Spirit* does chiefly consist in making Resistance to the ordinary Powers of the Holy Ghost, which are given to every particular Man wherewith to profit himself, and to grow in the Graces and Virtues of a good Life.

And tho' the Abuse of these Gifts of the Holy Spirit is a great Sin, yet it does not appear in its own Nature more unpardonable than other vile Sins.

Fifthly and Lastly, I will endeavour to rectify the Mistakes and Errors about these Matters, which have been the Occasion of some Men's Presumption, and have run others into despair.

(1.) It is an Error in Men, from a Persuasion of their own Piety, to conclude they have the Spirit of Prophecy or Revelation. For no degree of Holiness does produce an ability to prophecy, or in an extraordinary manner to discover the Will of God.

A Man by becoming sincerely good, does not acquire a Capacity or Privilege to interpret Scriptures, without understanding the Language wherein they were written; and without considering their Design, and comparing one Place with another.

Moreover, tho' commonly the extraordinary Powers of the Spirit were given to good Men, yet sometimes they have been separated.

The Spirit of Prophecy was given to *Balaam*, an Idolater ; yet we have no knowledge of his Repentance, nor ground to believe he died the Death of the Righteous.

Caiaphas, the High-Priest of the *Jews*, prophesied that *Jesus* should die for that Nation ; and yet there is no justifying his having imbrew'd his Hands in Innocent Blood, unless by an extraordinary Revelation from Heaven he had received a Power, as well to kill our Saviour, as to foretell his Death.

And *St. Paul* also supposes, that the miraculous Powers and the ordinary Gifts of the Spirit, may be parted. *Tho I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and tho' I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* 1 Cor. 13. 2.

On the other hand, a very ignorant and unlearned Man, who is so far from an ability to interpret the Scriptures, that he cannot read them ; may be truly Pious, and have his Soul filled with the Fruits of the Spirit, Love, Peace, Joy, Meekness, Patience, and the like.

(2.) It is a dangerous Error, for any to pretend, by an extraordinary Revelation, or any other way, to have Assurance of Salvation, distinct from that which proceeds from a Sense of having performed the Terms of the Gospel, upon which

which Salvation is promised. Faith comes by the Word preached ; and we can give no sound Evidence of our Love of Christ, but by keeping his Commandments ; nor that we are led by the Spirit, but by not fulfilling the Lusts of the Flesh.

No, we must only judge of our Spiritual State by the Word of God, where we find plain Rules to try our selves by. *In this the Children of God are manifest, and the Children of the Devil, whosoever doth not Righteousnes is not of God. If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin.* 1 John 6, 7.

Having used some Arguments against unwarrantable Presumption. I shall say something to others against Despair. And

(1.) To those, who by reason of ill Thoughts which spring up in their Minds, even sometimes when they are at Prayer, which reflect on the Goodness and Providence of God, do take themselves to be guilty of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, which never shall be forgiven.

Now this Case of theirs, which relates only to what passes between God and their own Souls, is very different from that of the *Pharisees*, who in the Face of the World maliciously blasphemed the Power of the Spirit of God, by which Christ wrought Miracles to confirm the Authority of his Divine Commission, and to convince
Men

Men of the Truth of his Gospel, as I have shew'd already. Wherefore

If such Melancholy Christians do not give Consent to their bad Thoughts, but resist them as much as they are able, and do still persevere in the performance of the Duties of Religion; it is not to be doubted but God will pardon them, and deliver them out of their Troubles, and reward their Sorrow and Grief for serving him no better, with everlasting Life.

(2.) Some have an ill Opinion of their Religion, and think themselves destitute of the Helps of the Spirit, because they find their Minds indisposed at their Devotions, and they want proper Words to express their Spiritual Needs, and to return Thanks to God for his Mercies.

I answer, that a Man may have a Devout Soul, and a Thankful Heart, notwithstanding any Heaviness in his Natural Constitution, and defect of suitable Words to express his Prayers.

And God does distinguish between the Abilities of Nature, and the Goodness of the Intention in the Performance of the Duties of Religion; for it is not the Fluency of the Tongue, but the Sincerity of the Heart, to which he hath regard when we Pray. Neither does he expect more from any, than he has given: The poor Widow who cast in her *two Mites*, was as acceptable, as the rich Men who brought large Portions of their Wealth to the Treasury.

But

But they who, through want of Words, find their Devotions interrupted, may with much Profit use the Forms composed by other Holy Men. It was with due Consideration of the Needs and Infirmities of his Church, that our Lord left that excellent Form of Prayer to his Disciples, which was of great Benefit not only to them, but to Devout Persons of all Times in their Religious Exercises.

Nor ought we to set a less Value on this Comprehensive Form of Prayer, because Men of *both Extremes* have yet agreed in making little Use of it.

The Custom of saying the Lord's Prayer but once every Week, prevailed so much among the Religious Orders in *Spain*, that the Fourth Council of *Toledo* thought it necessary to make a Canon to enjoin the Priests to use it constantly in their daily Offices.

But it cannot but be Cause of Grief in our unhappy Days to find Men to insinuate, that their Benefit is little, either in set Forms, or set Hours of Prayer: Who would have all Divine Worship reduced to occasional Devotions. And because some who frequent the Publick Service, and are constant at their Prayers in their Closets, are observed to be bad Men; therefore they can be contented with laying the appointed Hours and Forms of Prayer aside.

But because there are Religious, as well as other Hypocrites; and some, only to make a show, say long Prayers; must the Times and Forms of
Prayers

Prayers be abolished, from which good Christians receive unspeakable Comfort daily, and find the truest Support of all their Trouble?

Indeed it must be granted, that neither Daily Prayers, nor constant receiving of the Sacrament, will avail Men any Thing with God; unless, they pray with Heartiness and Sincerity, and their Devotions have a ruling Influence over their Minds and Manners.

But there is no question, but those who use constant Hours and Forms of Devotion, may compare their Lives with those who use none; and will be found to serve God, their Country, and their Neighbour with more Faith and Integrity.

And it is not to be doubted, but upon a fair Computation, the greater Number of those who go to the House of God as often as they have Opportunity, and are every Day constant at their private Devotions; will be found to be of honest Conversation, and to live agreeably to their religious Profession.

And let any with Reason judge, which in all likelihood will be best prepared to pray unto God, and praise him suitably to particular Occasions; they who every Morning and Evening pour forth their Souls in Prayer unto him, or they who reserve and restrain their Devotions to these Occasions only.

Certainly the Frequency of Prayer, if we be sincere in what we do, will add Ability, Easiness, and Pleasure to our Devotions, and will dispose

dispose Men with more Vigor and Fervency to address themselves to God upon especial Occasions, and unfeignedly to return him Thanks for every extraordinary Mercy, and every signal Deliverance.

Does it not look like a Thing of Evil Design, to cast any disparagement upon the Set Forms and Time of Devotion, both in Publick and Private; when the Prophet *Daniel*, who possessed so large a Share of the Spirit of God, did say his Prayer Thrice every Day? and not only good Christians, ever since the Appearance of Christ, but the *Jews* before his coming, had their constant Times of Prayer; and the *Mahometans* do solemnly pray every Day *Five Times*.

But it cannot but be matter of deplorable Consideration, which must pierce the Hearts of Good Men; that in our unhappy Days Persons should appear, who not only undervalue the Prayer, but the whole Religion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It must be Cause of Grief, that having so admirable a Religion brought down from Heaven, and confirmed by a number of Miracles; so many should be found to question the Truth of it, and to be insensible of the great Blessings it affords us in this Life, and the comfortable Hopes it gives of our attaining endless Happiness in the next.

Why should Men endeavour to lay aside the Excellent Religion of Jesus Christ, and their hopes

hopes of Redemption by him, which he purchased with his own Blood; when they have no other of equal certainty and Advantage to substitute in its place?

How unmanageable will the World be found, how ungovernable the Passions of Men; when the Obligations that Religion laid on their Consciences, are loosed and taken away?

How is Bread brought to the hungry, Cloaths to the naked, and Succour to the miserable and distressed, by the lively Sense of Charity, which our Religion does inspire into the Souls of Men!

The less Religion there is in the World, the worse all Affairs will go in it. Piety, and Virtue, and Temperance advance the Strength, and establish the Reputation and Interest of Nations: but by Vice and Luxury they tumble down, and become an easy Conquest to their Neighbours.

In proportion to the abatement of the Service of God; Kingdoms, Societies, Families, single Persons, do all sink and decay. Wickedness preys upon the Vitals, and robs Men of their Riches, Health, and Strength, and Wisdom; deprives them not only of the Ability, but the very Will and Inclinations to serve their Country and their Friends.

And here we cannot but observe, that they who despise the Christian Religion, and renounce the Assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the other Aids of the Gospel; have yet given no Proof of more Perfection in their Nature, and that they stand in less need of 'em.

They

They have not made themselves appear to be greater Masters of their Passions, or to have more mortify'd the Lusts of the Flesh. The contrary is so true, that no Body will think it any wrong to 'em to say, that generally Men void of the Principles of Religion, have very bad Morals.

But, to come to a Conclusion: What is most remarkable, and does deserve the seriousest Consideration, is, that nothing makes Death appear so terrible, as the want of Religion; nor fills Men so much with Fears about the future State, as their having made no Provision for it all the time of their Life.

It is ordinary to see them in bitter Agonies, and to hear their fruitless Wishes, that God would trust them with a little longer time, which they certainly would improve to his Glory, and to advance the Honour of his Religion.

But on the other side, we never hear that any good Man, when he came to die, did repent that he had served God so much, or that he had been too temperate, and chaste, and devout in his Conversation, or that he had done too much good to others, or that he had been over-profuse of his Charity to the Poor. No, these alone are the Reflections, which in our last Hours can administer any solid Comfort and Joy to our departing Souls.

May we therefore never renounce the Holy Religion of Jesus, in which we have been baptised; nor resist the Holy Motions of the Blessed Spirit

Spirit which he hath sent to guide us : May we daily increase in all the Graces and Virtues of a good Life ; and under all the Troubles and Difficulties of the present Condition, preserve a lively Hope in Christ our Saviour ; and wait with Patience for the Day of his second Appearance, and enter with him into an everlasting State of Peace and Joy.

SER-



SERMON V.

ACTS XVII. 31.

He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

O Man travell'd into more Countries, nor visited so many Places to preach the Gospel, and to persuaade Men to believe it, and conform to its Holy Laws, as *St. Paul*. Of his Journey to *Thessalonica*, and from thence to *Berea*, and so to *Athens*, we have an Account in this Chapter. At *Thessalonica*, the Metropolis of *Macedonia*, he found a Synagogue of *Jews*, with whom he reasoned so clearly, and with Arguments fetch'd from the Scripture, prov'd so strongly, that Christ must

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needs have suffer'd, and risen again from the dead; that of the Jews, ver. 4. some believed, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude.

These Greeks were Preselytes, who notwithstanding they did not wholly subject themselves to the Law of Moses, yet having abstained from Idolatry, and devoutly worshipping the One only true God, they were admitted by the Jews into their Synagogues, to hear the Law and the Prophecies read.

But the obstinate Jews, who believ'd not, seeing all the City in an uproar; it became necessary for St. Paul to depart privately from *Thessalonica*, and to go by Night to *Berea*; where the Inhabitants being of a sincere and generous Spirit, and disposed to embrace whatever should appear to be true upon clear and full Proof, did receive the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures whether these things were so, v. 11. But when the unbelieving Jews of *Thessalonica* had intelligence that St. Paul was preaching the word at *Berea*, and had made many Converts; they came thither immediately, and stir'd up the giddy and unconstant multitude, and put them into so great a Rage, that the Holy Apostle was forced to leave that Town also.

Wherefore, conducted by some of the Church, he continued his Journey to *Athens*, the most famous University for Learning, Wit, and Eloquence in the World. And here St. Paul had to encounter with not only a Synagogue of Jews, but also two Colleges of renown'd Philosophers, the *Epicureans* and *Stoicks*.

Now

Sermon V. Of the Future Judgment. 99

Now as he had combated successfully with the *Jews* from the *Laws of Moses* and the *Prophets*, which they had receiv'd; so he fairly attacks the *Philosophers* with such *Principles of Reason* as they could not but acknowledge, and likewise with the *Testimonies and Authority* of their own *Writers*. He having observ'd the *Athenians* to inscribe their *Altars*, and direct their *Devotions* to the unknown *God*; and it being a thing of melancholy and uncomfortable Consideration, to worship they knew not what; he thought he should both enlighten their *Understandings*, and give some *Warmth* to their *Devotions*, by discovering the *Nature* of that *God* to them, of whom they had so little *Knowledge*: Wherefore he declared that this *God* made the *World*, and all things therein; seeing that he is *Lord of Heaven and Earth*, dwelleth not in *Temples* made with *Hands*, neither is worshipped with *Mens Hands*, as if he needed any thing; seeing he giveth to all *Life*, and *Breath*, and all things; being completely perfect, and subsisting entirely of himself. Which Propositions concerning *God*, as they were demonstrable by undeniable *Reason*; so it was a Concession of their own *Poets*, That *God* is the *Maker* of all *Men*; for we are also his *Offspring*.

Now from this Concession of the *Pagan Philosophers*, that *God* was the *Creator* of *Men*; he shews the *Aburdity* and *Unreasonableness* of *Idolatry*, unto which they were so generally addicted.

Ver. 29. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone graven by art, or man's device.

Thus then, his Argument proceeds: If Men are the Workmanship and Offspring of God only, as they confess; and the Images, which they hitherto have worshipp'd, are made by the Hands of Man; then 'tis most rational Men should render their Devotions to that God who gave them their Beings, and not to the Golden, Silver, or Wooden Images, which they carved with their own Fingers.

For must not he be more senseless and stupid than the Stocks and Stones themselves, who with how much Art soever they are graven and painted, shall believe any of them to be God, and adore it? For this is to believe that the Image made Man, who was its Maker.

And thus the Wise Apostle having laid a good Foundation, he proceeds to raise some necessary Doctrines upon it: viz. he having proved the Existence of one Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, which is the Foundation of all Religion; and discover'd the Folly, Madness, and Impiety of worshipping Idols, which is to give the Honour only due to him, unto the meanest of his Creatures; in the next place he exhorts them to Repentance.

And this Doctrine of Repentance he enforces by an Argument taken from the Justice of God, which hath engaged him to decree a Time, when

when he will call Men to an Account, and pass Judgment upon their whole Behaviour in this Life; rewarding them for the Good they have done, and punishing them for the Evil wherein they have persevered without Repentance.

But when the Philosophers heard of the Resurrection of the Dead, which is necessarily imply'd in the Doctrine of a future Judgment; some mock'd, and others said, we will hear thee again of this Matter. It is not unlikely that the *Epicureans* should mock at a Future Judgment; For they whose Passions and Lusts have so far transported them, as to say that God takes no care of the World; nor observes the Lives of Men at all now; must in Consequence to their own absurd Opinions, deny that he will judge it hereafter.

But it is probable the *Stoicks* were smitten with the Force of this great Truth, of a Judgment to come; and therefore desired to hear *St. Paul* again, and to have fuller Information of this weighty Matter.

However this be; in Commendation of the *Stoicks* it may be said, that no Sect of Philosophers hath stated the Measures of Good and Evil so truly as they have done; and that their Doctrines and Rules of Life, of all others, come nearest to those in the Christian Institution.

Now if the *Stoicks*, who were in a manner Strangers to all Supernatural Revelations, were desirous to understand and be instructed in the Matter concerning the Day of Judgment; surely we Christians, who are baptized into that

Faith, where it is a principal Article; and who have the special Assistance of the Divine Grace, so to frame the Course of our Lives, as that we may be accepted at the Day of Judgment; ought rightly to perceive the Nature of it, and deeply to be affected with that Part we must bear in it: So to be affected, that we may make it our chief business, to prepare and qualify our selves for the Second coming of Christ to be our Judge.

Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. From which Words we may infer,

(1.) The Certainty of a future Judgment: God hath decreed it, and already raised his Son Jesus Christ from the Dead, as a full Assurance that he will execute that Decree.

(2.) That God hath constituted his Son Jesus Christ to be the Judge; *he will judge the World by that man whom he hath ordained.*

(3.) That this Judgment shall be universal, and include Men of all sorts; for 'tis the World he will judge.

(4.) That the Time when this Judgment shall be, is already fix'd: *God hath appointed a day.*

(5.) That the Law by which the great Judge will proceed, shall be most just and equal: *For he will judge the World in Righteousness.*

(1.) The

(1.) The Certainty of a future Judgment: God hath decreed it, and already raised his Son Jesus Christ from the Dead, as a full Assurance that he will execute that Decree. Before I shew the Force of the Argument in the Text, to assure us of a Day of Judgment, in that God hath raised Christ from the Dead already; I shall take leave to insist on some other Arguments, which in great measure may be discover'd by Natural Light, as well as by Revelation. We argue then for the Certainty of a Judgment to come,

(1.) From the Nature of God. For if we consider the Nature of God, and the State of things in the World, and compare them together, it will abundantly convince us of the Certainty of a Judgment after this Life. For if we do believe that there is a God, we must grant that he is a Being of infinite Perfections, and that Justice is one of these Perfections; and that a Being infinitely Just, will not suffer Injustice always to go unpunish'd. And if also we do reflect upon the Condition of things in the World, we shall find that many Acts of high Injustice, in all Times and Places, have not only escaped Punishment, but been attended with Success; and hence must conclude a Time most assuredly will come, when God shall bring all these unjust and wicked Deeds to Judgment: For the Judge of all the Earth will do right.

As God, by the Creation of the World did shew Almighty Power; and the putting things together with so much Order, and Beauty, and

Subserviency one to another, did manifest his unsearchable Wisdom; and as in preserving every thing in the excellent Condition in which it was at first made, and in ordering due Provision conditionally for all the Necessities and Wants of his numerous Creatures, he does convince us of his wise Providence, and of his perpetual Care over us, and Kindness unto us: So at the End of the World, by taking an Account of all the Deeds of his rational Creatures, done in this Life, and by measuring out to them Rewards or Punishments, respectively to their past Behaviour; he will give full Proof of his exact and unerring Justice.

At the present indeed we often see Men notoriously Wicked to thrive and flourish; and we see the Virtuous and Humble abused and oppress'd, and mark'd out for the common Objects of Derision and Contempt: Just as if Prosperity was the Reward of Wickedness, and Adversity the natural Fruit of Virtue. But since it is altogether inconsistent with the Divine Justice, that Piety should always pass unrewarded, and Sin ever go unpunish'd; we cannot but come to this Conclusion:

That notwithstanding hitherto, for good Reasons, God hath forbore to issue forth a general Process against Sinners; and hath not constantly bestow'd present Rewards upon Holy and Good Men; yet the Day already appointed, most assuredly is drawing on, *when he will judge the whole World in righteousness.*

Neither

Neither is any one so much to wonder, that a Being infinitely Just, should not always reward Virtue, and punish Sin immediately. For from God's Forbearance, great Advantage may accrue as well to good as bad Men. First, To good Men; For were they perpetually rewarded for their good Works, as soon as they were done; they would be apt to grow too much in love with this World: For nothing does more powerfully wean their Hearts therefrom, than Troubles, Losses, and Disappointments. When Men are afflicted and persecuted, then, if ever, they will confess and beg Pardon for their Sins, and lift up both their Eyes and Hearts to Heaven for Succour and Relief, and place their Affections upon those certain and unperishable Delights, of which no earthly Power can deprive them. So that Crosses and Sorrows are the proper Means to disengage us from the Pleasures of this Life, and to preserve us for, and make us earnestly desirous of those of the next; and our Blessed Saviour himself was made perfect by Sufferings.

Again, the Nature of the Covenant God has made with us, does require, that Good Men in this World should as well be exposed to Sufferings, as receive Blessings: For the present State is a State of Trial, as the future State will be a State of Rewards. But if good Mens virtuous Deeds were constantly follow'd with immediate Recompences; as there could be no place for the Exercise of their Meekness, and Patience, and Self-denial, and readiness to forgive Injuries, which are Virtues peculiar to Christian Religion;

so there would be no Tryal of the Sincerity of their Love of God, and how long and how much they would be content to lose and suffer for his Sake and in his Cause.

Then as to Wicked Men, They have great Reason to thank God for his Forbearance; for in sparing them when they deserve Punishment, he not only gives them time to repent, but kindly invites them to it, and lays before them most prevailing Arguments to melt into Tears for having offended a God so full of Mercy and Compassion, and to break off their Sins by a speedy return to their Duty. Besides, let them who complain that God delays to punish the wicked, remember, that was not Mercy as well as Judgment to be found in the Divine Nature, no Flesh could live and appear before him.

(2.) We argue for the Certainty of a Future Judgment from our own Nature. The Strength of which Argument will appear from these two Considerations.

1. Because God has made us free Agents, by giving us a Power over our Actions; and in the right Use of this Power consists Virtue, and in the misuse of it, Vice. So that we may do good if we will, and cannot be forced to do evil. Now the Power God has given us to do Good or Evil, does qualify us to be govern'd by Laws, and makes us capable of Rewards or Punishments.

But since God, who endow'd our Nature with such Powers, does not judge us for the use of them

them in This World, we have all the Reason to expect he will do it in that which shall follow.

(2.) As God has given us Power over our Actions, so he hath furnish'd us with Understandings to perceive what will please or offend him, and to distinguish between Good and Evil, our Duty and our Crime.

Indeed the eternal and unalterable difference between Good and Evil, is so easy to be discover'd by Natural Reason, that in a manner all Men are agreed to account some things Good and some Evil. And generally the most barbarous People in the World are not without a Sense of the comeliness and beauty of Virtue, and the unagreeableness and deformity of Vice. For God has so framed our Natures, that if we do Good, we have something within us that does approve it; and if we do Evil, the same thing condemns it.

We cannot do a virtuous Deed, without suddenly perceiving Satisfaction and Delight in our Minds; we cannot do a bad thing, without presently feeling remorse, trouble, and fear. And all this not only from the Consideration of the Punishment which Human Laws may inflict; but in such Cases, which either the Laws do not reach, or which cannot be discover'd; and in such Men likewise, either whose Authority secures them from the Laws, or whose Power will break through them.

What Sentiments the Pagans had of Virtue and Vice, and of the Rewards and Punishments which they drew after them, we may learn from a famous

mous Instance recorded *Acts* 28. 4. concerning *St. Paul* shipwreck'd on the Island of *Melita*. The Barbarians, when they beheld the Viper driven out by the heat of the Fire, and fastned on *St. Paul's* Hand, declared among themselves, as their general Sense and Opinion, *No doubt this man is a murtherer, who, tho' he has escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffers not to live.* Hence these things are evident; (1.) That these rude Islanders had true Notions of the difference between Good and Evil. (2.) That good Actions ought to be rewarded, and evil ones to be punish'd. (3.) That when heinous Sinners escape the Punishments which Men have enacted, the Divine Vengeance will lay hold on them, and not suffer them to live.

And consequently, that there are dreadful Punishments, different from those which are annexed to humane Laws; from which notorious Sinners never can escape and secure themselves, notwithstanding they may flie from the Axes and Gibbets in the Country where the Crimes were committed.

I might also instance in *Felix*, a Man in great Authority; for when *St. Paul's* excellent Discourse had awakened his Conscience, so as he became sensible of the vile Wickednesses which he had committed, what a quaking Fit seiz'd him; all his Limbs tremble and shiver! Neither the Character and Quality of his Person, nor the Presence of the People before whom a Governor ought not to have betrayed any Fear, could hinder

him

him from discovering the terrible Apprehensions in his Soul, of a Judgment to come.

(3.) A Third Evidence for a Future Judgment may be taken from the insufficiency of all Human Laws, either to reward Virtue, or to punish Vice.

Mighty Armies and Bodies of Men commit Rapine and Violence, and often there is not Force enough in the Laws to punish and restrain them. Again, many Sins are committed secretly, and the Law can take no hold of them; but such secret Sins the Justice of God will bring both to Light and Judgment. Neither can the Wisdom of Man so contrive Laws, as that they shall extend to all Cases and Crimes; insomuch that a Person may so cautiously steer the Course of his Life, as not to come within the Reach and Punishment of any Human Law whatever, and yet be a very ill Man, and have a Heart full of Treachery, Malice, Uncleanness, and Revenge.

Moreover, none of our Thoughts fall under the Consideration of Mens Laws, any further than they break out into open Actions. Yet the governing our Thoughts aright, is strictly required of us by God; who will as certainly punish our wilful Sins committed within our own Breasts, as he will do those we act in the sight of the World.

Further it may be shewn, that there is the same insufficiency in Civil Laws to reward all kinds of Virtue, as there is to restrain all sorts of Vice:

Since

Since many of the Acts of Virtue may be in as secret Instances, as those of Vice. Holy Men do many good and generous Deeds, of which the World knows nothing; and they look for no other Reward than the Favour of God, and the Joy which thereupon naturally springs up in their Minds. And besides, the Condition of the World is such, that it is not able duly to recompence every Good Work; or to make a proportionable Satisfaction to Holy Men for their Sufferings for Righteousness sake. And so we may observe worthy Men in all Ages to have undergone the bitterest of Evils, without any hope or prospect of Temporal Recompences. *They have been tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.* Heb. 11. 35.

(4.) A Fourth Argument for a Judgment to come, may be drawn from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our ever-Blessed Saviour, which is the Argument used by St. Paul in our Text. *For if Christ be risen from the Dead, then is our Resurrection possible:* And if there is so close a Relation between him and us, that he is the Head, and we the Members of the same Body, the Church; then his Resurrection does infer, not only the Possibility, but the Necessity of ours.

For we cannot suppose the Head to be revived and raised from the Dead, without the other Parts of the Body; not a Master without his Servants, nor a King without his Subjects.

The

Serm. V. Of the Future Judgment. III

The same Causes which moved God to raise Christ from the Dead, that he might become Judge both of the Quick and the Dead, make it absolutely necessary, that all the Dead should be quickned, whom he is to judge.

As therefore a Judgment to come is a fundamental Article of our Religion, so there is no Article therein more agreeable to human Reason than it. For if God created us, and we have received the whole that we enjoy from him, what can be more reasonable than that he should call us to an Account for it; and pass Judgment upon us according to the Use we made of the Goods he committed to our Trust?

All the World hold it very equitable, when a Master has put his Stock into his Servants Hand, that he should require him to account for it; for it is the Master's Right to enquire into his own Estate, it is the Servant's Duty to bring in a particular of his Management. And the same Reason which holds in the Relation between a Master and his Servant, will oblige more strongly between God and his Creatures; because God has shew'd more Kindness to the worst of all his reasonable Creatures, than ever the best of Masters did to the most faithful of Servants.

But it may be objected, That notwithstanding a Future State of Rewards and Punishments therein, seems very suitable to natural Reason, and is a fundamental part of all Religions; yet very little of these Things seems to be discovered in the Law which God himself gave to the Jews his own People.

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To this it may be answered, that the Hopes the *Jewish* Nation had of Rewards after this Life, were not chiefly grounded on their Law, which did but typically represent these Matters; but they came down by a general Tradition from the Patriarchs and other good Men: And as their slow and heavy Understanding grew riper for them, and their publick Necessities made them more needful; these comfortable Truths of Rewards in another World, were explained, improved, and confirmed unto them by the Holy Prophets.

But we may observe, that the Notions of the next Life were never so amply unfolded and illustrated, and taught the *Jews* so clearly, as about the Time of the *Babylonian* Captivity. For when the Wall of *Jerusalem* was broken down, the House of God consumed with Fire, the Vessels of the Temple Destroyed, and not only the Publick Exercise of Religion suppress'd, but the People themselves carried Captive into a strange Land; Then it was, (to the end, that they labouring and grieving under such a dreadful Weight of sharp and various Calamities, might not forget their God, and change the Service he had instituted among them, for the Idolatrous Worship of the Nations among whom they were to mingle;) that the Prophet *Daniel* did give a more distinct Account than any before him, of a future Judgment, and of Recompences laid up for afflicted Virtue. Dan. 12. 2. *Many of them that sleep in the dust of the Earth shall awake: some*

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to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame. About this Time, *Isaiah* also prophesied, *thy dead Men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise; Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, Chap. 26. 19.*

Then also *Ezekiel* uttered a Prophecy of the dry Bones, viz. *That flesh and sinews should come up upon these bones, that skin should cover them, and that the breath of life should enter into them.* So that *Hilary of Poitiers* bestows upon him the Title of the Prophet of the Resurrection. And from this Time forward, the Apprehensions of another World cleared up, and the Hopes of Heavenly Rewards for Temporal Sufferings did daily increase.

The Story 2 *Macc. 7. 9.* is remarkable; of the Seven Brethren and their Mother, who in one Day suffered a cruel Death, rather than they would transgress the Law of their Fathers; the Second of whom, after the Executioner had pull'd off the Skin of his Head with the Hair, and when he was at the last gasp, said, *The King of the World shall raise us up, who have died for his Laws, unto everlasting Life, ver. 11.* The Third Son held forth his Hands to be cut off, and said courageously, *These I had from Heaven, and for his Laws I despise them, and from him I hope to receive them again.* In the same Religious Submission and Hopes of future rewards, died the rest of 'em; but last the Mother, marvellous above all, did bear her Death with wonderful Courage, because of the Hope she had in the Lord.

And tho' the *Sadducees* under all that Light, continued so stupid as to deny the Resurrection, Angels and Spirits ; yet the *Jewish Nation* generally believed a future Life.

And that which did first betray, and afterwards fix the *Sadducees* in such an absurd Error, as the denial of the Resurrection ; was their rejecting the Writings of all the Prophets, as Apocryphal, wherein these comfortable Truths were contained ; and their receiving only the Law of *Moses* for inspired Canon, which did not speak plain in these Matters, it being delivered before they were qualified for them.

(2.) God hath constituted his Son Jesus Christ to be Judge ; *he will judge the World by that Man whom he hath ordained.* God by Right of Creation is both Judge and Governor of the World, and none can have any Claim but he himself, to take an Account of his own Creatures.

But God has translated this Right, originally in himself, unto his Son Jesus Christ our ever blessed Lord and Redeemer. *For the Father judgeth no Man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son.* John 5. 22.

So that by a vicarious Power derived from his Father, it is, that Christ shall judge the World. And we may observe God in this Act of Translation of his Judiciary Power, to have done great Honour to his Son, and to have manifested much Kindness and Good Will to Us.

Great

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Great Honour to his Son, in that He, who was despised by the World, as the Son of a Carpenter, slander'd as a Glutton and Wine-bibber, traduced and reviled as a wicked Impostor, blasphemed as a Confederate and Agent for Devils; lastly, accused, and condemned, and executed as the worst of Malefactors; shall return again in great Glory, riding on the Clouds, with Ten Thousands of his Saints and Angels, to execute Judgment on the same World who had so maliciously treated him: *And to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

God in giving this Power to his Son, hath manifested also much Kindness and Good-will to Us. For Christ being constituted our Judge in his Human Person, we shall be able to come before him, and to see our Judge. Whereas no fleshly Eyes can behold the Majesty of God, or bear the Glories of his Presence: Whom the Wicked shall never see, nor even the Righteous, until this Corruptible shall have put on Incorruption, and these mortal and earthly Bodies shall be changed into Immortal and Heavenly ones.

Then we shall see God as he is, and it shall be our infinite Happiness and Reward to dwell in his Presence, and to Love and Worship him to all Eternity: Besides, it will be matter of great Comfort to have Christ our Judge, who did put

our Nature upon him, and was made liable to all the Infirmities thereof; who is sensible of our Frailties and Errors, and of the manifold Temptations which daily Assault us; and will make a Merciful and Gracious Allowance for them all: Who knows, and has felt our Weakness and will pity it.

It is true indeed, that nothing will more heighten the Terrors of the Wicked, than to be brought before Christ for their Judge, who was once their Advocate with God, and made daily Intercessions for them; but thro' their Impenitency and hardness of their Hearts, they defeated all his precious Undertakings, and render'd his powerful Mediations at the Right Hand of God ineffectual.

He would have persuaded them to chuse everlasting Happiness, by the most endearing Promises, offering to assist and encourage their feeble Endeavours with supernatural Help.

But they sleighted his Invitations, rejected his Offers of Assistance, and continued thro' the whole Course of their Lives to affront his Mercies, to abuse his unwearied Patience, and to injure and deride his most tender Compassions.

Tis sad to consider, under what dreadful Perplexities these wretched Sinners will fall, what dismal Fears will lay hold of them, when the Blessed Son of God shall pronounce Judgment against them; whom with so many earnest and repeated Importunities he had begged and entreated, that upon easy and reasonable Terms they

they would have accepted him for their Saviour.

(3.) That this Judgment shall be universal; *for 'tis the World he will judge by that Man whom he hath ordained.* It will include Men of all Sorts, both good and bad; for some shall rise to everlasting Life, and some to everlasting Shame: Persons then of all Ages, Times, and Places, of all Characters, and Qualities, and Conditions, without Exemption, or Excuse, must appear before the Seat of this Judgment.

No Gift will pass with this Judge, nor can any Power resist him, neither Eloquence nor Importunity shall put the least stop to his Proceedings: but immediately, impartially, uncontrollably he will give Sentence on all Flesh, never to be reversed, since from him there can lie no Appeal.

And here it may be proper to observe, as suitable to the present Occasion, That notwithstanding every particular Man shall have a Tryal and Sentence past upon his Actions at the Day of Judgment, yet God judges Nations and Kingdoms in this Life only. For Men partly by their natural Inclinations, and partly by their want of mutual Help, are led to join in Societies. Which Societies incorporated and united by Common Laws and Privileges, can have a Subsistence only in the present World; And therefore according as their publick Management and

Behaviour hath a Tendency, either to advance God's Glory, or to reflect Dishonor and Contempt upon him, he Rewards or Punishes them here ; because, as was observed, the Artificial or Political Bodies into which Men do combine, are only fitted to the present Necessities and Dispositions of Mankind, and will not exist for ever in another State.

It is true, that single Men shall be punished in the next Life, for the Sins they did in this, even as they were Members of the Publick Body ; but the Body or Kingdom it self will have its share of the Divine Favours or Judgments here, while it does continue in its Publick and National Capacity.

A Kingdom, by wholesome and wise Laws, may protect, preserve, and promote the true Worship of God in Publick, and suppress Atheism, open Prophaneness, Irreligion, and Idolatry ; it may hold Even the Balance of Justice in all Cases between Man and Man ; and by encouraging Virtue, and punishing Vice, it may countenance the Holy, the Humble, and Innocent, and be a Terror to all Evil-Doers.

Now where these excellent Designs are steddily pursued in any Nation, God ordinarily makes it to flourish with Victory over Foreign Enemies, with Peace at Home among its Inhabitants, and with Riches and Plenty in its Streets.

But on the contrary, if the People of any Country despise the publick Service of God, and by their Negligence and Indifferency suffer the Purity of the Divine Worship to be depraved and corrupted with

with Mixtures of Man's Invention; then usually he removes the Light of his Gospel from them, and lets them grope in Darkness and Error, and be deluded with Vanity and Superstition, as not having set a just Value upon the inestimable Blessing he had bestowed upon them.

Thus likewise when Ease and Prosperity do soften the Spirits of a People, so as they give themselves up to Sloth and Luxury, to Gluttony and Drunkenness, to Chambering and Wantonness; God leaves them to themselves; and then the Temper of the Nation soon grows crazy, weak, and sickly; the Good Will among the Inhabitants one towards another, does visibly abate; Fears and Jealousies take place, Strifes and Variances spring up, insomuch that casting away all Care of the publick Good, they greedily seek the Destruction of each other.

And to add to the Miseries which their Sins have brought upon them, God visits them with his Judgments; he brings them low, and distresses them with Famine, he consumes their Dwellings with Fire, he devours them with the Plague, and cuts them short with the Swords of their Neighbours.

And when none of these heavy Judgments produce a general Reformation, but their Wickednesses are grown up to a Ripeness fit for Destruction; he stocks them up by the Roots, permits their whole Constitution to be dissolv'd, and themselves to be made Slaves and Captives, and no longer to continue a Nation or People.

(4.) That the Time when this Judgment shall be, is already fix'd: *God hath appointed a day.* But tho' the Time is already set, yet the Day when it shall be, is kept secret, as well from the Angels in Heaven, as from us poor Mortals upon Earth.

Neither was it revealed unto Christ himself, 'till after his Resurrection; as he declares, *Mark 13. 32. Of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* For the Divine Nature, as soon as it had assumed our Soul and our Flesh, did not make known all Truths unto the Human Understanding; but Jesus increased in Wisdom, and one thing was communicated after another, the Nature and the Reason of his Mediatory Undertaking did require; To the carrying on of which upon Earth, it was not necessary, before his Resurrection, to know the Day and Hour appointed for the Judgment: But after the Resurrection, as all Power was given unto him, so the Divine Wisdom did impart all Knowledge unto the Human Soul.

Now the Reasons why God keeps secret the Day of Judgment from us, are chiefly Two, and much the same with those for which he conceals from particular Men the Time of their Death: Both that, when that Day did approach near, Men might not fall under Horrors and Consternations; and partly, that Men having no knowledge when it shall come, may all along be obliged to make due Provision for it.

Now

Now if every Man knew the precise Day of his Death, the very Thoughts thereof would be continually rising up in his Mind, and rack and perplex it. And hereby his Appetite would become so benumbed and flat, (especially as Death became near him,) to Study and Business, that all the necessary Employments for the Benefit of our selves and others in this Life would be laid aside. And the World must have expected but little Advantage, either in the Invention or Improvement of Arts and Sciences, or in the good Administration of the publick Affairs, from those who have, many of 'em, been great Benefactors to Posterity; had they themselves foreseen, what did happen, that they should have died in the Flower of their Age.

Thus likewise, had the very Time when the World shall be judged, been declared from the beginning; then, probably, those who lived in the early Ages thereof, would have been nothing or but coldly affected with the Consideration of it: For the most dreadful Dangers, while consider'd at a remote distance, usually make little or no impression on the Minds of Men.

And on the other side, when that solemn Time had come pretty close, Men would be so filled with dread and horror at the Apprehension of it, as to forsake the Prosecution of all things which were for the good of this World. Such Fears would stop their enacting good Laws for the publick, and put an end to building, and planting, and cultivating the Earth, and of all befitting Care of Posterity.

Wherefore

Wherefore God in great Wisdom hath left us under Uncertainties, both as to the Times of Death and Judgment; that as on one Hand, we may not cease moderately to Study and Labour, and to procure decent and modest Supplies for the Necessities and Conveniencies of our selves, and of those who shall succeed us; so on the other, we should constantly join the Service of God with the Business of this Life, and, with Minds resign'd to his Blessed Will, ever be waiting for the Time of our Dissolution, and diligently prepare our selves for it.

For since we do not know at what Watch of the Night our Lord will come, 'tis our Duty and Interest to keep Oil perpetually in our Lamps, that we may be in readiness to enter with him, and the Door be not shut upon us.

O happy shall we be, if having truly repented, and unfeignedly believed his Holy Gospel, and done those things which it does require; we shall be found acceptable to our Gracious Lord, at the Moment when he shall put an end to our present Race, and call us to an Account.

(5.) That the Law or Rule by which our great Judge shall proceed, will be most Just and Equal; *for he will Judge the World in Righteousness.* The Law by which Men at the last Day shall be judged, is the Will of God, so far forth as it hath been publish'd unto them; to some, by Supernatural Revelation; to others, by the Light of Nature only.

Now

Now the Rule the Divine Will shall proceed by, appears to be most Just and Equal,

(1.) Because it is a known Rule: God will bring Men into Judgment, only for that part of his Will which was sufficiently discover'd unto them; for he will try every Man by his own Conscience, which will either accuse or excuse him: But not any Man's Conscience will accuse him for the Transgression of Laws, whereof he was invincibly ignorant. *This is the condemnation (saith our Blessed Saviour,) that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, John 3. 19. For every one that doth evil, hateth light, ver. 20.* So that Condemnation will rest upon Men for having the Light; but no Man can be judged and condemned for having the Light which he never had seen.

(2.) Because it is an easy Rule. The whole Duty God lays upon Man, is not only Possible and Practicable, but, by the help of his Grace, very Easy. The Sentence shall pass on no Man for the things that were not in his Power, but for the Acts which proceeded from his Will, against God's most Righteous Laws.

(3.) Because it is a reasonable Rule; There being nothing that God has made our Duty, but, by a direct Tendency, it will procure and increase our private Happiness, and advance the Peace and Welfare of publick Societies; all the Evils in the World owing their Original to our Sins.

And thus I have gone thro' the several Parts of the Argument, prov'd the Certainty of Future Judgment.

Judgment, represented who shall be our Judge, and upon whom Judgment shall pass; shewn that there is a Day appointed for this great Work, and that the whole Process shall be according to Righteousness. And I hope the Consideration hereof may engage us all to live as become Christians, who look for a Day of Judgment, and constantly to be fitting our Souls for it.

It now only remains briefly to consider how we may make this Discourse useful to our selves and the present Occasion, so that our Nation may escape the Miseries and Desolations of War and Famine, with which it is threatned for its great and manifold Sins; and we, every one in particular, may save our Souls in the Day of the Lord, by so effectually judging and reforming our Manners now, that God may not condemn us hereafter.

(1.) The first thing then that seems proper to be advised, is, that we would not only Fast and Pray before God in his House, but use great Temperance and Moderation in the whole Course of our Lives, cutting off all Superfluities, and whatever doth minister to Luxury and Vanity.

These Expences at all times deserve to be retrench'd, but especially at such Seasons when Fasts and Prayers are necessary to avert the Judgments of God from our Countrey. Hereby we shall be enabled not only to bear the unavoidable burdens of War with Cheerfulness, but also to continue the Portions of Charity, which we

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used privately to deal out to the poor and needy.

It is certain, that they who will make no abatement of the Pomps and Delicacies of Life, how zealous Patriots soever they may pretend to be, cannot be thought heartily to be concern'd for the Calamities of their Country, or to have contributed what in them lieth for its Defence against a most terrible Enemy, who makes such great Preparations for our Destruction, and hath in a manner reduced his own Subjects to all sorts and degrees of Misery, that he may the more certainly devour Us.

(2.) There ought to be a general Endeavour to procure a sincere Reconciliation among our selves, so that our Breaches may be closed, our Wounds healed, our Differences compos'd, and we united to one another in Love and Affection. *A house divided against it self cannot stand.* When so Potent an Adversary is to be repell'd as we contend with, nothing less than an Union of Hearts, as well as of Hands and Purse, will be necessary.

In order to this, we ought sincerely to separate our private Designs from the common Interest; and not, by the one, allow our selves to be diverted from pursuing the other.

How can we hope God should bless us and prosper our Affairs, if under pretence of serving the Publick, we strive to ruin one another, and secretly to gratify our Revenge.

If therefore we heartily design such a Reconciliation as is necessary for the publick Safety and

and Welfare of the Nation, we ought not greedily to listen to the ill Reports of others, or to propagate them; we ought not either to believe or disperse what is said to the disadvantage of another, but upon good Proof; and even then, to put as favourable an Interpretation on the matter as it will bear. We must not needlessly make ourselves Accusers, for generally there will be enough to take that Office out of our Hands.

And where it's necessary to find Fault, it should be in such a soft and gentle Way, as may convince the Offender, rather than stir his Passions.

Zeal for our Country will ever deserve great Commendation; but however, That Zeal will work no good, if it be not temper'd with Wisdom and Charity. We ought to remember, that by all the Acts of our Charity, whether it put forth it self in passing Judgment on others, or in forgiving the Injurious, or relieving the Needy; we shall lay up a Treasure of Merit, which at the Day of Judgment our Saviour will accept as kindly, as if he had partak'd of it himself.

(*Lastly,*) It only remains to Pray, that the Consideration of the Day of Judgment may have a continual Influence on our Lives. This will tend mightily to make us sincere Christians, faithful Subjects, true Friends, and good Men in every Capacity, and to behave our selves honestly in all the Stages and Turns of our Life.

This

This will set a Watch over our Thoughts, as well as upon our Lips; since the most secret Thoughts are all discerned by our Judge, and shall be examined, and have a Sentence pass upon them.

How can we cherish Malice in our Hearts against them who have offended us, and Thirst for their Ruin, who remember how greatly we shall stand in need of the Mercy and Favour of God, when we shall appear at his Judgment Seat; that he will not then forgive us, unless we now forgive them; and that to them who do Judgment without Mercy, he will shew no Mercy.

How can we deliberately cozen, and wrong, and over-reach our Neighbour; when we shall be utterly undone, if we do not find, not only Justice, but Pity and Compassion in our Judge. How can we have such fierce Desires to heap up Riches, when in so short a Time they will leave us, or we shall be taken from them, and they will be so far from standing us in any stead at the Day of Judgment, that our Account then will swell and grow more difficult in Proportion to the great quantity of them which we possess'd.

And there is as little reason to give Place to vain and high Thoughts of our selves; since God who gives his Grace to the Humble, and Meek, and now abhorreth the Proud, will at the last Day certainly condemn them.

Or that we should defile our selves with Brutish Lust; since our Judge is of too pure Eyes to behold Iniquity, and that only the Pure in Heart shall be admitted to see God.

More-

Moreover, as the Thoughts of the Day of Judgment will be a strong Guard against all those crying Sins which waste the Conscience; so the remembrance of the infinite Rewards good Men then shall receive, will be a true Support of our Minds, under all the Afflictions we endure for Conscience Sake; and will also endue our Minds with Fortitude and Constancy, so that we shall courageously, maugre all Opposition, persevere in every righteous and honest Cause.

May then a fervent and sincere Zeal for the Honour of God, and the Preservation of the pure Religion he has established among us, for the Happiness of our Country, and its Deliverance from all its Enemies, and for obtaining the Salvation of our own Souls; prevail with us, by the Help of the Holy Spirit, to forsake all our Sins; and entirely to conform our Minds and our Practice unto the most Holy Will of God; that at Christ's Second coming, we may be found in Peace without spot and blameless, and be admitted by him into the Mansions of everlasting Glory.

S E R-



SERMON VI.

JAMES II. 22.

Seest thou how Faith wrought with his Works, and by Works was Faith made perfect?

 **T**HE first Converts had false Notions and Prejudices to lay aside, they had unruly Lusts to subdue, they had unlawful Pleasures to forsake, and worldly Interests and Advantages to renounce, before they could become true Disciples of Christ.

With the difficulty of which Undertaking many being discouraged, they hoped to lessen the Labour, and abate the hardship of their Work, by endeavouring to join their old Persuasions and loose Course of Life with their new Religion.

K

Hence

Hence it came to pass, notwithstanding the Care our Lord and his Apostles had taken plainly to unfold the Mysteries, and fully to declare and teach the Doctrines, and openly to publish the Laws, and earnestly to press Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel; that many Errors in Judgment, and much Corruption in Practice, did early creep into the Church.

The most dangerous of these Errors were opposed by the Apostles; some undertaking one, some others. And it was the pernicious Persuasion of those new pretended Converts, who were willing to declare their Belief of the Truth of the Doctrines, if they might be excused from the Observation of the Holy Precepts of the Christian Religion; which St. *James* here refutes.

Now as St. *James* writ against those who relied on their Faith without Works; so St. *Paul* confuted the Opinion of them, who hoped to be saved by their Works without Faith.

And notwithstanding these Holy Men did treat in a very different Sense both of Faith and Works, as I shall make it my Business to shew hereafter; yet it seems probable, and was the Opinion of the Ancients, that the erring Persons whom St. *James* encounters, might find a pretence for their Errors and Mistakes in some Passages of the Writings of St. *Paul*, which they did not understand, and which, at first sight, appear to contradict what St. *James* has here delivered.

For

For in the Verse before our Text, he says, *Was not Abraham our Father justified by Works, when he had offered Isaac his Son upon the Altar?* Ver. 21.

But then we find written by St. Paul, what, upon the first view, seems just opposite to this Assertion of St. James. *If Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. — Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.* Rom.

4. 2. 3.

The Thing then I now would undertake to shew, is, That there is no Difference of Opinion in the Writings of these two great Apostles; and that they are so far from contradicting one another, in what they have delivered concerning Faith and Works; that they were exactly of the same Mind.

In order to which Performance, we may consider,

(1.) The different Occasions of their writing their Epistles.

(2.) That the different Occasion of their Writings, caused them to speak of *Faith and Works* in a different Sense.

(3.) That when they treat of the same *Faith* and the same *Works*, they agree entirely in their Judgments about them.

(1.) We are to consider the different Occasions on which St. Paul and St. James did compose their Epistles.

For the discovery of which, it will be necessary to give an Account of some of the Chief Controversies, which were first raised in the Church, and were the Cause of much Disorder in it; and in the quieting of which, the Apostles found much Trouble.

But before I do this, it may be of Use to make one general Observation concerning the Epistles of these inspired Writers. Which is this; That their Epistles were written to Churches or Bodies of Men, who had already embraced Christianity. And therefore their primary Design was not so much to convert Men to the Faith, as to confirm them in it.

By preaching, they usually brought Men over to the Christian Religion; and afterward by their Apostolical Letters they not only established them in those Truths which they did believe, but also did refute and endeavour to suppress the ill Opinions which were already got among them.

But had they chiefly designed in their Epistles to convert Unbelievers; then, in all probability, we should have found in each Epistle, a compleat Body or System of the Doctrines and Precepts in the Christian Religion:

Whereas we see frequently mingled with the Laws and Doctrines, Reproofs of ill Practices, and Confutations of false Opinions, which had been entertained in the Infancy of the Church.

But to proceed to as brief and short an Account as I can, of some of the Chief Controversies, which first broke the Peace, and corrupted the

the Purity of the Church: It seems necessary to our purpose to take notice but of two or three.

(1.) The First was concerning the Persons unto whom the Gospel was to be preached; the Benefits whereof, the *Jews* did think were to be confined to their own Nation.

For They only being the Seed of *Abraham*, supposed that God's Promises of a *Messias* were made to them alone, and that the Mercies of the New Covenant should not be extended to any other Kingdom or People; as if the Children of *Israel* had been the only Objects of the Divine Goodness, and the Providence of God was to be restrained to the single Family of *Abraham*.

So strong was this Prejudice against the *Gentiles*, that it had a powerful Influence on the Apostles; insomuch that *Philip*, *Peter*, and *John*, who were dispersed in *Judea*, *Galilee*, and *Samarina*, did preach the Faith only to their Countrymen.

St. Peter was so fully possessed of this wrong Opinion, that the Heathen were Common and Unclean, and not to be received within the Pale of the Church; that a miraculous Vision was necessary to inform him that he ought not to despise the *Gentiles*, and to bring him to acknowledge and declare, *That God was no respecter of Persons: But that in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*, Acts 10. 34, 35.

But the other Apostles and Brethren, when they heard that the *Gentiles* had received the

Word of God, were offended at St. Peter, and contended with him, for going into the Company of Men uncircumcised, and eating with them.

Whereupon he was forced to make a large and particular Defense of himself, rehearsing the matter from the Beginning, and expounding in order unto them the whole Story of the Vision, in which was represented a vessel, like a sheet let down by four corners, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the Air; before they would believe that the Pagan part of the World should partake of the Benefits of the Sufferings and Death of Christ.

But when the Apostles and the rest heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, *Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.* Acts 11. 18.

This Opinion indeed of the Jews, that the Gentiles were not to be admitted into the Church of Christ, was very consistent with the Notion they had of the *Messias* before his coming; who, they thought, would be a great Temporal Prince, surpassing in Power and Glory all that had been in the World before him; who should conquer the whole Earth, and make them Rulers over it.

But since our Blessed Lord's Kingdom was not, as they vainly supposed, of this World; nor did he come to cloath his Disciples with secular Greatness, Honour, and Authority, but to endue their Minds with Humility, Meekness, Holiness and Charity, of which Graces and Virtues not only the

the Seed of *Abraham*, but the whole Posterity of *Adam*, were alike capable; it was both suitable to the infinite Goodness of God, and to the Nature of our Lord's Excellent Design, that all Men should be comprehended in his New Covenant, which was made and establish'd in his own Blood for the Salvation of Mankind.

(2.) I come to the Second Point in Controversy, which was, Whether they who had embraced the Christian Religion, were obliged to the Observation of *Moses's Law*?

When *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*, who had been chosen to go to the *Gentiles*, were return'd, and had made a Report of what God had done by them, and how he had open'd the Door of Faith unto the *Gentiles*; great Dissentions did arise concerning Circumcision; for certain men which came down from *Judea*, taught the brethren, *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*, Acts 15. 1.

And so stiff were these *Jews*, especially after they were joined with certain of the Sect of the *Pharisees* which believed, who likewise said that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of *Moses*; that *Paul* and *Barnabas*, after a long Disputation, not being able to convince them, it was determined they should go to *Jerusalem* to the *Apostles* and *Elders* about this Question.

Before whom assembled in a Council, *St. Peter* first declares, that the *Gentiles* by his mouth had heard the word of the Gospel and believed; that God had given them the Holy Ghost, even as he

did to the Apostles; that he had put no difference between them, but had purify'd their hearts by Faith. Wherefore he concludes in these Words, *Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the neck of the Disciples, which neither our Fathers nor we were able to bear?* ver. 10.

To the same purpose St. Paul and St. Barnabas deliver'd their Minds; At last St. James, supported by the Testimony of Simeon, how God at first did visit the Gentiles, and take out of them a people for his Name; gives his Judgment in this great Controversy, *Wherefore my Sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turn'd to God,* ver. 19.

(3.) But so naturally do Controversies and Errors beget and multiply one another, that from this mature and sound Decree of the Council of Apostles and Brethren at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles were not bound to keep Moses's Law; there were ill Men, who drew false and dangerous Consequences.

Because the Council had determin'd, that Christians were not under an Obligation to observe the *Mosaic* Laws; hence they concluded, they were tyed by no Laws at all.

And because St. Paul had written, that Christians were not required to do the Works of the Law, which could not justify a Man before God; they falsely inferr'd, that in the Gospel-State no Works at all were necessary; resolving the whole Duty of Christians into a Belief of those things Christ had taught and done; so that if they had Faith, tho' void of all good Deeds, it would
make

make them acceptable to God, as being all he expected of them. Which false Teachers are sufficiently described by *St. James*, *St. Peter*, and *St. John*, and other Apostles.

And thus I have given some Account of the first Controversies and Contentions in the Church, which concern the present Argument; and from whence we may perceive the different Occasions, on which the Apostles did write their Epistles.

For *St. Paul*, in almost every Epistle, disputes with the Judaizing Christians, who held the Law of *Moses* to continue in force under the Christian Dispensation; and that they should be justify'd by doing the things it commanded. But *St. James* does attack those counterfeit and lifeless Christians, who expected Salvation by a naked Faith, without Fruit, or Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel.

These were Men who perverted the Sense of *St. Paul*, and put a false Gloss upon many Passages of his Writings; and we have good Reason to believe *St. Peter* referr'd to them, when he said,

Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles, speaking of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their destruction, 2 Pet. 3. 15, 16.

Especially considering that *St. Austin*, in his Book of Faith and Good Works, does expressly affirm,

affirm, that this Epistle of St. James, the second Epistle of St. Peter, the first Epistle of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude, were all written to vindicate the Doctrine of St. Paul from the wrong Interpretation these Libertine pretended Christians had fix'd upon them.

And from hence plainly follows what we did assert in the Second Place :

(2.) That the different Occasion of the Writings of these two Apostles, did cause them to treat of Faith and Works in a very different Sense ; which matter does pretty plainly appear from what hath been already said.

We must observe, that notwithstanding the Holy Apostles, assembled together, had determined that the *Mosaic Law* did not oblige the new Converts ; yet many of the *Jewish Christians* did obstinately persist in maintaining the Authority thereof.

They had indeed this to pretend, that the Sentence of the Apostles did not directly concern Them ; it being pronounced in favour of the *Gentiles*, who were Strangers to the Law ; but it did not absolve Those from Obedience thereunto, unto whom God himself had given it. These unhappy Men, who all along had complain'd of the Weight and Rigor of the Law, grew fond of their Burden and Bondage, when God, by sending his Son, intended to deliver them from it.

This wilful Adherence of theirs to the Law, was a great hindrance to the Progress of the Gospel,

spel, and it cost the Apostles much Pains and Trouble to wean them from it.

But no Man labour'd this Matter so much as *St. Paul*. And here it will be proper to mention the Arguments with which he endeavour'd to convince them.

(1.) He proves, that the Design of the Law was not to justify Men, but to discover, and to preserve them from, the Idolatry and other Sins of the Nations round about them; and to prepare their Minds for the Reception of the more noble, spiritual, and perfect Dispensation of the Gospel.

The Law was added, (i. e. given) because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made, Gal. 3. 19. i. e. That the Jews, instructed by this Law, might understand that the Idolatries, Murders, Adulteries, frequent among the neighbouring Nations; were Transgressions and Offences against God, and so use their greatest care to avoid them, and to Repent and beg Pardon of God, if they chanced to fall into them.

Wherefore the Law was their Schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they might be justified by Faith; but after Faith is come, they are no longer under a Schoolmaster, ver. 24, 25. So that God only designed by the Law to have them instructed in the Elements and first Grounds of Religion, and disciplined for the Christian Religion, by Obedience to the Righteous Conditions whereof they were to be justify'd.
For

For, to be justified by Faith, is to be justify'd by the Terms of the Gospel.

(2.) He shews that Good Men before the Law, and the *Jews* under the Law, were not justify'd by it. And he instances in the Case of *Abraham* their Father: and proves that he was not accepted by God upon his outward Observation of the Law; for this Reason, because he was justify'd before he was circumcised; His Faith, saith *St. Paul*, was reckoned to him for righteousness, not when he was in circumcision, but uncircumcision, *Rom. 4. 10. i. e.* before his Flesh was circumcised according to the Law.

Abraham's Faith consisted in a Belief of the Divine Promises made to him; in trusting God, and serving him sincerely according to the Light which he had revealed unto him. So also the honest virtuous *Jews* approved themselves to God, not so much by an outward Observation of the Ceremonial Law, as by loving and fearing God, and depending on his Promises of a Saviour; and by living up to the Laws of Nature, and the Holy Traditions of the Patriarchs. And thus we find the Lord, frequently by his Prophets, to expose the vain Oblations, and nice Regard of Ceremonies, and other Legal Compliances, of them who lived wickedly, and had no regard to Justice and Mercy; which Practices were very unacceptable to him. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord thy God? Mic. 6. 8.*

(3.) St.

(3.) St. Paul proves the Insufficiency of the Law to appease God's Displeasure, from a defect both in the Order of Priesthood, and in the Sacrifices. He says, *that the Law having but the shadow of good things to come, and not the very image, can never with those Sacrifices make the comers thereunto perfect*, Heb. 10. 1. And, *there being no possibility that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin*, ver. 4. And that in the first tabernacle were offer'd both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, Heb. 9. 9. There was not Dignity in the Priest, who being a Sinner, offer'd blood for himself, as well as for the errors of the people. Neither was their Power and Efficacy in the Sacrifice, which only consisted of the Blood of Beasts.

(4.) To reclaim the Jews, who were Baptized into the Faith of Christ, from the Observation of the Mosaical Ceremonies; he argues, If there had been such Excellency in the Old Priesthood and Oblations as they pretend, that then a new Law and a new High-Priest would have been needless. For, says he, *if perfection were by the Levitical Priesthood (for under it the People received the Law,) what further need was there that another Priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec?* Heb. 7. 11. *If the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second*; Heb. 8. 7. But since the Law made nothing perfect, the bringing of a better hope did, by which we draw nigh to God; Heb. 7. 19. But now we have a Me-
diator

diator of a better Covenant, which is established upon better Promises. Heb. 8. 6.

For, all that was promised to Men upon Obedience to Moses's Law, was to enter, conquer, and possess the Land of Canaan: But the far exceeding Hope of the Gospel is, that we shall be Citizens of the New Jerusalem above, a City not made with Hands, where we shall behold and worship God for ever.

(5.) Once more; St. Paul does baffle the Jews Pretence to a Legal Justification, upon their own supposal of the Perfection of the Law; in that they were guilty of the Breach of that Law they did so much admire. For no Men can be justified by the Law they have transgressed.

And on this Account he sharply exposes the Pride and Hypocrisy of the Jews. *Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit Adultery, dost thou commit Adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?* Rom. 2. 22, 23.

So unreasonable was it for Them, who in so many Instances had made themselves Obnoxious to the Penalty of the Law, to hope for Justification thereby.

We observe farther, that by the same Argument St. Paul had refuted the Legal Pretensions of the Jews, he does also bar the Gentiles from the Presumption of a Right and Title to the Approbation and Favour of God; since They also had shamefully transgressed the Laws of Nature, and acted

acted against the Reason wherewith God had endued their Souls for the due Government of their Thoughts and Actions. *Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkned: And they worshipped the creature more than the Creator; and for these causes were given up unto vile affections.*

And thus he proves that *Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. Rom. 3. 9.* And that none could plead for Justification on the score of their Innocence; but therefore were under absolute necessity of a Redeemer, who should interceed with God on their Behalf, and make Satisfaction for their heinous Crimes.

So that all the good Things we receive from God, must be reputed not the Recompences of our Righteousness and Obedience, but the pure and free Issues of his Mercy and Compassion.

And thus we see what Works *St. Paul* rejects as unfit Ingredients of Justification; not Godliness and Vertue, not Holy and Charitable Actions, which have an intrinick Goodness in their own Nature; but the Works of the Law, which had no Goodness in themselves, and were only valuable because they had been commanded; which Goodness or Value was expired with the Law.

(3.) That when *St. Paul* and *St. James* speak of the same Faith, and of the same Works, they agree entirely in their Judgments about them.

For whereever *St. Paul* treats of the same Faith *St. James* did, namely a mere Assent of the

the Understanding, he makes it insufficient; and where he treats of the same Works, he makes them absolutely necessary both to justify and save Men.

To shew how low an Opinion *St. Paul* had of a naked unactive Faith, taken in the strict Sense of *St. James*, and how necessary it was to join Good Works to it, we have Instances beyond Exception.

Tho' I have all Faith, says he, *so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing,* 1 Cor. 13. 2.

Here he puts the strongest Case imaginable for Solifidians; and supposes a Man so fully to assent to the Truths of the Gospel, and so firmly to believe the Power of God, as to attain the highest Degree of Faith, even That whereby he may do Miracles; and yet, if he wants Charity, *i. e.* Will and Affection to do all the good which comes within his Power, he declares That Man to be nothing: Nothing in God's Favour and Esteem: Which is with *St. James* to say, that his Faith is Dead. The same Apostle when he teaches that Faith is counted for Righteousness, does positively and frequently affirm, that it is a Faith which worketh by Love; and that Believers ought not to be weary of well-doing, but must do good to all Men, as they have Opportunity.

In the same Epistle where he delivers the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, he declares the Necessity of Repentance and Mortification of fleshly Lusts, and that at the Day of Judgment we shall receive a Sentence suitable to our Works.

Works : *If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye thro' the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the Body ye shall live, [Ch. 8. 6.]* and that hardned Sinners treasure up Wrath against the Day of Wrath and Judgment, when God will render to every Man according to his Deeds, Rom. 2. 6. Nay, in this very Epistle, where he had run down the Works of the Law upon which the *Jews* valued themselves, and those done by the mere Strength of Nature without Grace and Faith; he does publish a Body of Ethicks, or a compleat System of Christian Vertues, hardly omitting any Duty we owe to God, or to our Neighbour, or our selves; and requiring strict Observation of them all, as the necessary Means of our Salvation.

We cannot here avoid observing, that St. Paul, St. James, and the rest of the inspired Writers do not lay more stress on Good Works, than our Saviour did himself. To produce an Instance or two. *By their Works, ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father, which is in Heaven,* Matt. 7. 20, 21, 22.

No calling upon our Lord; nor, much less, upon the Virgin Mary his Mother; never so large a Number of Pater-Nosters, nor Ave-Maria's, can save Men; but only their Obeying the Will of God, publish'd in the Gospel.

Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharises, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, Mat. 5. 20.

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Therefore

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doth them, (he must not only hear and believe, but practise them,) I will liken him to a wise Man, who built his House on a Rock.

And to this very purpose our Lord gave an Answer to the Young Man, when he enquired what he should do to have Eternal Life: *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments.* We must not only take the Name of our Lord in our Mouths, but have a sincere and hearty Piety rooted in our Hearts; we must not only roll, rest, and rely our selves on Christ by Faith, but we must affectionately love him, and manifest those Affections by carefully and diligently keeping his Commandments, if we will enter with him into everlasting Life. To this Sense the Holy Father *Justin Martyr*; Not only they who profess the Lord with their Tongues, but they who confirm their Profession with Works, shall be saved.

Nay, Such a just Value had the Wise *Pagans* of Virtue and Honesty, as the Quality which made them pleasing to God; that they forbade the Wicked and Prophane to come near their Altars, and to approach their Religious Assemblies.

For the further Improvement of our Argument, we may from the foregoing Discourse collect these Things.

(1.) That by the New Covenant made by our Lord Jesus Christ, and ratified in his Blood, we engage our selves not only to believe sincerely, but to live godlily; not only to yield Assent to the Truths, but to perform the Duties of the Gospel.

Gospel. Accordingly in our Baptism we have *vow'd and promised*, not only to *believe in God the Father Almighty*, but *obediently to keep his Holy Will and Commandments*, and to *walk in the same all the Days of our Life*.

(2.) That great Things are said of Faith in Scripture : The first Place is given to it, because it is the only Foundation on which a Holy Life can be raised.

It is the Root from whence all truly good Works spring. For to love and fear God, to be just and kind to Men, to preserve our selves free from the Defilements of the Flesh ; must suppose our hearty Belief that God is, that he exactly regards the Actions of our Life, and that he will reward those who seek him.

But then, as there can be no Good Works without Faith, so Faith is thus far only valuable, as it brings forth Good Works, the proper Fruit it should produce. And so likewise we have just Reason to look upon Good Works, as the truest Proof of our Faith.

(3.) We observe, That this Faith, so acceptable and well pleasing to God, is in the Holy Scripture usually joined with Charity, and declared Vain without it.

For according to the Citations before out of *St. Paul*, if the Faith of a Man was so powerful, as that he could work Miracles ; if it inspired him with such extraordinary Courage, that he could suffer Martyrdom for his Religion, and give his Body to be burnt by the Merciless Flames, and was destitute of Charity ; even these

bitter Sufferings would not avail to reconcile God to him.

And when the said Apostle compares Faith, Hope, and Charity, he declares the most Excellent to be Charity. Indeed Faith and Hope will both end with this Life; but Charity will accompany our Souls to Heaven, and be that Grace which will make us amiable to God to all Eternity.

Most careful therefore is this good Man, who never under-rated Faith, to unite Charity with it. *Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace;* 2 Tim. 2. 22. *Hold fast that form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Jesus Christ;* 2 Tim. 1. 13. *Peace be to the Brethren, and love, with faith, from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good Works;* Titus 3. 8.

(4.) It may be observed, whereever Religion is summed up, and abridged into Epitome; that Charity is always brought in, as most essential to it. The Prophet represents the Sum of Religion, as consisting in the doing of Justice, loving Mercy, and walking humbly with God.

When our Saviour had declared the Great Commandment was, to love God, with all our Heart, with all our Soul, with all our Minds; he pronounces the Second to be like it, to love our Neighbour as our selves: And that on these, hang all the Law and the Prophets. These being observed, the other Doctrines and Precepts in the Law

Law and Prophets would be safe and secure ; but these Two great Commandments being neglected, the rest would tumble down, and profit them nothing who were Observers of 'em. And upon this Consideration St. Paul says, *he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law.*

(5.) As Charity is made the Rule and Test by which our Religion is to be tried, and whereby sincere Piety may be discerned from the Counterfeit ; so it prepares and disposes our Minds to perform the other particular Duties of Christianity.

St. John pronounces him to *walk in darkness, and his Eyes to be so blinded that he knoweth not whither he goes, who hateth his Brother ;* 1 John 2. 11. And that *he is a Liar, if he says he loves God, and hateth his Brother ;* 1 John 4. 20.

Indeed there is no ground to imagine how we should love God, and not love his Creature ; or how we should truly love our Brethren, the excellent Work of his Hands, and not sincerely love and honour Him. So that if we find a Person, who calleth upon God, and devoutly worships him ; we have great Cause to suppose, that he is kind to his Neighbours, does good to Men, and omits no Opportunity of helping and relieving them.

Christian Charity, it *extinguishes the Rancor, Malice, and Bitterness which possesses the Hearts of Carnal Men, and which indisposeth them for the Service of God and the due Care of their Fel-*

low-Creatures: It makes them Merciful to the wrong-doers, and ready to forgive the Injuries of their Enemies: It makes them free-hearted, and liberal in supplying the Wants, and easing the Miseries of their distressed Brethren.

There is none so weak in his Intellectuals, so worthless and contemptible in his Person, so mean in his Condition, so low in the World; but he falls under the tender Care of God's Providence, which has charged it self with all such, and will make due Provision for them.

Now Charitable Men may be said to be Deputies of the Divine Providence, who execute the wise and merciful Decrees thereof; and the Instruments wherewith God fulfils his Promises, and makes his Word good to all his reasonable Creatures.

By their Bounty, Churches are built, and Ministers sent into the World to teach the People Righteousness; and Hospitals are founded for cloathing the Naked, feeding the Poor, and curing the Sick.

When a good Man is carried off, either by Violence or Diseases, and leaves behind him a distressed Family, the Charitable Persons are they who step in the place of God, and provide for the Widow, and give a pious and honest Education to the Orphans.

The Providence of God has engaged it self to preserve his People in all Times of Danger and Trouble; to cover their Heads, and to hide and shield them from Blood-thirsty Men who hunt

hunt their Lives: All which Merciful Designs are brought about by the Courage, Compassion, Wisdom and suitable Assistance of those whose Souls are filled and fired with Zeal for God, and Love for Men.

And thus we see the Necessity, the Excellency of a Faith that worketh by Love, and that putteth forth it self upon all Occasions in Acts of Mercy and Compassion.

To conclude the whole.

If we will give Belief to a Cloud of Inspired Witnesses; if we will submit to the joint Authority of *St. James*, and *St. Paul*; if we will be determined by the uninterrupted Conjunction of Faith and Works in the Life of *Abraham*; lastly, if we will believe the Words, or reflect upon the most perfect Example of the ever-Blessed Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith; we shall be abundantly satisfied, that That Faith, which is the Condition of Justification first and afterward of Salvation, does not only illuminate the Understanding with Truth, but inflame the Will with Devotion and Charity; does not only clear the Mind from the Mists of Infidelity, but purifies the Heart from corrupt and filthy Lusts.

May God therefore enable us by his Grace, not only to believe all that he has said, but to practise all that he has commanded; that our Conversation may be as becometh the Gospel, and that we may give all Diligence

to add to our Faith Virtue; to Virtue, Knowledge; to Knowledge, Temperance; to Temperance, Patience; to Patience, Godliness; to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity. That Faith, I say, in the Company of all these Christian Graces and Virtues, may dwell in, and daily encrease in us, God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.

S E R.



SERMON VII.

PSALM XXV. 7.

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord.

ALTHO' the particular Occasion and Time of writing this *Psalms* cannot be certainly determin'd from the Facts and Circumstances therein related; yet all agree, and it plainly appears from the Design and Subject of it, that *David* was in much Trouble and Distress when he composed it; caused not only by Fears of his numerous and implacable Enemies, who were contriving Plots against him; but also proceeding from a deep Sense of his Crimes, wherewith he had offended God, who alone could rescue him,

Things

Things were come to an ill pass, Danger was near, and his powerful Adversaries in view, and God had hid his Face, unto whom he used with just Assurance to apply himself for Deliverance. But how unworthy soever his Faults had made him of the Divine Favour, in this great Difficulty he humbly addresses himself to God, in confidence of his infinite Mercies and Goodness, of which he had large and long Experience; first for Protection from his Enemies, and then for Pardon of his Sins, which brought them upon him.

Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my Soul, let not my enemies triumph over me; they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred. Shew me thy ways, and lead me in thy truth, and remember thy tender mercies and thy loving kindneses, for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord.

Upon the Case and Behaviour of David, several Observations may be made.

(1.) That Afflictions are apt to cause Men to call to remembrance their Sins.

(2.) That the Sense of Sin disposes them to the Duty of Prayer, to humble themselves before God, and to ask Forgiveness of their Crimes.

(3.) That the best and strongest Arguments to prevail with God to pardon Offenders, must be taken from his infinite Goodness and Mercy.

(1.) That

(1.) That Afflictions are apt to cause Men to call to remembrance their Sins.

Which Truth we learn not only from the Behaviour of *David*, who upon the first News of his Enemies Design against him, became conscious of his Guilt, call'd his Sins to *Mind*, and beseeched God not to remember them, *i. e.* not to punish him for them; but also of most Penitents, whose Repentance usually has commenced from some Judgment or Calamity laid upon them by the good Providence of God; so that if they still had lived in ease and in quiet, probably they would have continued still in their Sins.

When any Hurt is felt, or Damage sustained, it is natural to enquire after the Causes of them: And for the most part, with little Enquiry, Men in Distress may find their Sins were the Occasion of their Sufferings:

Except when God permits good Men to be persecuted for the Tryal of their Sincerity, the Exercise of their Patience, and the Improvement of their other Virtues; to make them Examples for the Imitation and Support of weaker Christians, when they shall be brought into Trouble on account of their Holy Religion.

It is observable, that all Afflictions do not equally dispose Men to recover the Remembrance of their Transgressions: But the more Shame, the more Danger, and the more Terror any Calamity brings with it, so much more Force it

it will have to awaken the Conscience, and to make Men think of their crooked Ways.

Moreover, Judgments use to terrify bad Men, not only by their Greatness, but when their approach is sudden and unexpected; and also when there is a plain and natural Relation between the Sin and the Punishment; as when Want follows expensive Luxury; and when Rioting and Intemperance sink the Health, and produce a sickly Constitution; and when Loss of Credit and Reputation, do attend Deceit, Falshood and Perjury.

The Reason now, why Troubles incline Men to reflect on their Trespases, is manifest and obvious; because they draw off the Minds of Men from the Contemplation and Use of the good Things of the World, which did possess all their Thoughts in Prosperity.

For dangerous Sickneses, great Losses, publick Disgrace and Contempt, broken and wounded Spirits, will cool the Passions of the Revengeful, tame the Ambition of the Proud, extinguish the Lust of the Voluptuous, and destroy the Gust and Relish of sensual Pleasure.

Infomuch that if Tribulation does not put Men in Mind of their Wickedness, and incline them to forsake it, it will be their own fault; since it is a proper Means for that End, and sent from God on purpose for our Reformation.

Thus Moses to the Children of Israel, *The Lord thy God led thee forty years in the wilderness to humble thee*, Deut. 8. *And I will cause*

you

you to pass under the rod, and there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loath your selves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed, Ezek. 20, 37, — 43.

And for this Cause the wise Heathen commend a mixture of the Evils with the Goods of this World; as believing Them miserable, whose Minds by a constant Enjoyment of carnal Delights, are softned and dissolved; and Those happy and beloved of God, whom he exercises, tries and purifies with Troubles and Difficulties and Pains; such Afflictions being the Occasion of Virtue.

(2.) That the Sense of Sin disposes Men to the Duty of Prayer, to humble themselves before God, and to ask Forgiveness of their Offences.

To have a Sense of Sin, is to acknowledge we have broken the Laws of God, from whose All-seeing Eye our Transgressions cannot lye hid, and from whose Almighty Power there is no making any escape. 'Tis to confess our selves disobedient Children, who have violated the Duty we ow'd to a most Gracious and Merciful Father, from whom we receiv'd our Excellent Beings. 'Tis to own we are ungrateful Rebels, who have committed Treason against our Sovereign Lord and greatest Benefactor, under the Government of whose Providence we have been protected in the Enjoyment of all the Necessaries, Conveniences and Comforts of our Life:

And

And consequently, that both in Interest and Duty we are bound to fall down before him, to humble our selves in the Dust, and earnestly to pray he would not remember our Sins, nor enter into Judgment with us for them.

Thus Adversity abroad, and Trouble of Mind within, raise a strong Sense in us of the want of the Reconciliation and Favour of God; for we can have no hope of having Peace restored to our Minds, unless God will be pleased to be reconciled to us; nor shall we be able to withstand Temptations, to endure the Pains, to sustain the Losses, to bear the Burdens and Reproaches which we may be exposed to by our own Folly or the Malice of the World, if once destitute of Divine Assistance.

For every Man is certify'd by his own Experience, that there is not Wisdom and Strength sufficient either in himself, or all his Friends, to struggle with, and master these Difficulties: Neither his own Care, nor the Skill of every Friend he has, can ensure to him the continuance of Quiet in his Mind, or of Health in his Body, or of good Fame and Reputation among Men, or of Prosperity and Success in his Affairs. Neither yet has he Security of that Aid in any of these Cases, which his Friends can Minister to him, whose Affections are fickle and changeable, according to the various Appearances of their own Interest.

So that being affected with a Sense of our Miseries and Iniquities, we either must address our selves to God, who alone can support and defend

defend us, and fully satisfy the capacious Desires of our Souls; or else give all up, and suffer our selves to be overwhelmed with Despair, which is the greatest Madness possible, and the Effect whereof is most sad and deplorable.

Wherefore when Tribulation and Sufferings bring our vile Transgressions to our Remembrance, which in Prosperity we had forgotten; and when the Sense of them does terrify our Consciences, and incline us to return to God, whom, while we were satiated with worldly Pleasures, we did not regard; have we not cause to believe our Afflictions were very necessary for the Cure of the ill State of our Souls? And are we not bound in the best manner we can, to thank God for sending them in so suitable a Season, and for so excellent a Purpose; since therefrom we shall reap more sincere and solid Advantage, than from all the Worldly Goods we ever had in our Possession?

(3.) That the best and strongest Arguments to prevail with God to pardon Sinners, must be taken from the infinite Goodness and Mercy of his own Nature.

For when we are treating with God for Pardon and Peace, we cannot insist on any one thing, as having Right and Property in it; but must gratefully accept such Terms as he will be pleased to give us. For not having any thing independently and originally of our selves, there is no Foundation for such a Right: and They can claim no Property in any part of the Creation,

on, who were themselves fetch'd out of nothing.

So that whatever God shall be pleased to grant us, it must result from the Goodness and Clemency of his own Excellent Nature.

Neither will Honour, or Power, or other Advantage, accrue to God by our most exact Obedience, whose infinitely perfect Nature is incapable of Additions; he having made us purely for our selves, as Objects on whom he might employ his Love and Kindness. For after our best, we are but unprofitable Servants to him. Nor may we stand on our Innocence, or pretend to justify our Behaviour, when we plead our Cause before God; as if we had abstain'd from all Evil, and had arrived at Perfection in our Obedience to the Divine Laws.

Every Man's own Conscience will contradict such a false and ill-grounded Presumption; which may be confuted by daily Experience, *and if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.* It hence appears, that as we had no Original Right to the Creatures in the State of Innocence; so in this lapsed Condition we have forfeited the derivative Right to them, that God of his Grace had vested us with.

Whether therefore we pray for the Forgiveness of our Trespases, or for Relief against our Enemies; we have no Topick to use, but the Mercy, the Love, and the Compassion of God. With the Royal Psalmist we must pray, *that God would deal with us, according to his tender mercies and loving-kindnesses, which have been ever of old put forth*

forth in defending, comforting, and saving his People.

'Tis to the Goodness of God, that Penitent Sinners must apply themselves; which will answer all the Necessities of our miserable Condition.

God's Goodness is of that Nature, that it cannot be exhausted; being without bottom, and without bounds. Our Sovereign Lord can never be weary, or his Stock spent, with doing kindness to the Works of his Hands. Want or Weariness are Marks of Defect, which can have no place in him; but belong only to Beings of our Rank and Size, who without some Intermissions, and fresh Supplies, could not persevere to the end of our Duty.

But the greater the Numbers are of Objects that depend on, and are supply'd by the Bounty of God, the more they serve to magnify the Power, to illustrate the Glory, and to display the Goodness of this compleatly perfect Being; and by all they receive, cannot drain his Stores, change his Will, or abate his Ability to shew Mercy.

Now all Men have been Partakers of the Divine Clemency, and the Lord hath shew'd his Strength and his Faithfulness from Generation to Generation. But as evident as this Truth is, yet Those have stronger Convictions of it, and much a livelier Sense of God's gracious Dispensations, who have spent their Time in Contemplation of the Greatness of his Works, in Admiration of the Wisdom of his Providence, (which so orders and

contrives all things, that they may serve the Ends of their Institution;) and in Observation of the Mercy and Goodness of his Government over the Children of Men : Who makes Provision for their Necessities, supplies them in their Wants, comforts them in Trouble, eases them in Pain, and stands always ready to grant Pardon and to give Grace to *them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his Holy Gospel.*

It cannot but be confess'd, that there are many discontented Persons, who dislike their Condition, and complain of their Miseries and Troubles, as if they were ill used ; and as if God was so far from being Kind and Good, that they hardly find him Just and Equal.

To which Complainers it may be answer'd in general, that What they enjoy, how little soever it be, it is more than they have a Right to ; and that What they suffer, how much soever it be, is yet less than their Sins deserve. So that they should apply to their own Case, what the Holy Prophet spoke from the Mouth of the most High, *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ? Lam. 3. 39.*

But to Answer something more particularly: If this Matter be justly and fairly estimated, it will appear plainly, that of the vast Train of Calamities and Sorrows which afflict and oppress Mankind, but a few are sent directly from God ; that many come from other Men ; and that more, by far, owe their Birth and Original to our selves.

What

What a small number are They who have been undone by Storms, or Blasts, or Floods, or Lightning, or Droughts, if put in the Scale against Those, who have lost their Lives, or suffer'd in their Estates, by War, Robbery, and Oppression, by Fraud, Perjuries, and Falshood?

And for several of the Harms and Mischiefs we receive from others, we may really thank our selves. We may have justly provoked them to use us hardly; and we have but little Cause to complain, if our ill Treatment of others be return'd to our own Bosom.

Men sometimes lose their Lives by the Persons they had enticed to be drunk: And the foolish Father ought not to find fault with any but himself, when he suffers in his Reputation and Estate, by the Viciousness and Extravagancy of his Children, whom he nurs'd up in Idleness and Luxury.

How few are born Blind and Lame, and with weak and infirm Constitutions, in comparison of those who break their Health, lose the use of their Limbs, and weaken their Senses by their own Excess? Intemperance has made many more Cripples, and sickly and consumptive Bodies, than Nature ever did.

And where one Natural Fool enters the World, you may see Hundreds of sottish Men, who have shatter'd their Heads, and crazed their Understandings by a brutish Indulgence of themselves in Drunkenness, Rioting, and Wantonness. Now how unreasonable is it to charge the Goodness of God with those Evils which are the natural

Fruit and Product of our own Sin and Imprudence.

But further : by all the Miseries and Evils, our Sins only excepted, that press hard on us in this Valley of Tears, we may make great Improvement in our Spiritual State. Hence we learn the Vanity, Weakness, and Inconstancy of the Creatures ; and that we ought to fix our Hope on God alone, who never can deceive those who seek him and rely on him ; and in whom only compleat Satisfaction is to be found for their Immortal Souls.

All things then duly consider'd, we shall find great cause to take Shame to our selves, and to give Glory to God. And he must be the greatest Enemy to himself, who does not thank God for his Long-suffering, which has hinder'd the inflicting that Punishment which was due to his Sins, and gives him still Opportunity to Repent ; who does not beg for that Pardon, which he has not deserved ; pray for that Mercy, he has justly forfeited ; and for that gracious Assistance to subdue all his Enemies fleshly and spiritual, which he has long neglected and shamefully despised.

So that if a Man search and sift his Thoughts, they will never offer him any one Exception against God's Government, or Reason to withdraw his Allegiance from him, or to blame his Laws for Injustice and Severity.

Now to make the Subject, of which we have been treating, the more Beneficial ; I would infer
and

and collect therefrom, two or three Particulars. As

(1.) That it is a part of true Wisdom, for those Men, upon whom God has laid no Afflictions for the exciting in them Apprehensions of the Danger of a wicked Life; to do something Themselves that may answer the End and Design of his Judgments.

And the Thing to be recommended, is, that they would set apart some Portion of their Time, wherein they will take into serious Consideration the State of their Souls; and for a Season retire from both the Business and the Pleasure of the World.

That they may Fast, or, as their Health shall require, be very abstemious, refraining from all Curiosity in Meats and Drinks and sensual Gratifications of the Palate; and so, having mortified their Lusts, and depress'd their unruly Appetite, they may humble themselves in the presence of God, bewail undutiful Behaviour to so gracious a Father, and testify their Abomination of the Wickedness to which they had enslaved themselves.

And when our Thoughts are not choaked with the Cares of the World, nor stifled with the Lusts of the Flesh; how ardent and earnest will our Prayers be! how raised and pure our Devotions! how warm and active our Zeal for the Honour of God!

We then shall more clearly perceive, and more firmly believe the Fulness of his Perfections, the

Greatness of his Power, the Immensity of his Wisdom and Goodness, and the Glory of his adorable Attributes.

But Men err in both Extremes, with respect to Fasting and Abstinence. Some Men place Merit in it, and suppose that thereby they shall make Satisfaction for their Sins; and yet unless Fasting be attended with Prayer and Sorrow for Sin, which bring forth Fruits worthy of Repentance, it will avail nothing.

But Others are for laying it aside as needless, if not superstitious; whereas discreetly used, with relation to our Health, and the Circumstances of our Condition, it may prove an excellent Instrument of Piety and Virtue.

For this reason the Christian Church has established the Use of it, and good Men have practised it in all Ages, both before and since the coming of our Saviour.

We may observe in Holy Scripture, that Fasting and Abstinence from delicate Food, and the laying aside of fine Apparel, have been declared to have the Nature of Afflictions, and been put in Practice to avert the Anger of God, and to procure his Blessings.

Ezra proclaimed a Fast, that he and the People might afflict themselves before God, to seek of him a right Way; thus *Daniel* upon his Fasting, is pronounced by the Lord, to have chastened himself before him. *David* cloathed himself with Sackcloth, and humbled his Soul with Fasting.

And our Blessed Lord and Saviour Fasted and Prayed, and declared the great Efficacy of both;
and

and his Apostles enjoined them in their Holy Offices, and recommended them to their Converts.

What then further I would but just say on this Point, is, that as when God brings any Calamity upon us for our Sins, we ought to Fast and Pray, that he may, not only remove the Calamity, but also forgive the Sin which was the Occasion of it: So when we have erred and strayed from the Ways of the Lord, and none of his Judgments have yet overtaken us; we then by Weeping, and Fasting, and refraining from several Instances of lawful Pleasure, (which is to afflict our selves,) and by giving of Alms, and by putting up Hearty Prayers to Heaven, should endeavour both to prevent God from sending the Judgments we have Merited, and for our Sins to procure a gracious Pardon which we have not deserved.

(2.) That to prevail with God for Pardon, it is not enough to confess and bewail the Sin which might be the immediate Cause of our Affliction; but that, to the best of our Ability, we call our Iniquities all to Remembrance, even from the first Time we could discern the Difference between Good and Evil; according to the pious Example of *David*, who prayed God *not to remember the Sins of his Youth.*

This Method will contribute much to the perfecting our Repentance, and to the putting our Souls in a safe Condition. But if we do

not Repent of every notorious Sin our Memory can recollect, we have no Assurance that God will forgive it. And a Pardon in Part, like Repentance in Part, will afford us small and poor Comfort.

If we do not bring our Sins, as far as our Memory will serve, all together, and declare our Abhorrence and Detestation of 'em; there will ever be room left for Scruples and Doubts, which will grievously perplex the Mind, and upon any Trouble will be ready to start up and confound us.

But it is well worth observing, how *David*, in a course of Penance, did more particularly apply himself to God for the Remission of the Sins of his Youth. Which shews what sad Apprehensions he had, of the Errors and Failings of that part of his Life. And how solicitous all Men ought to be, to obtain of God Pardon for the Neglects, Follies, and Transgressions of their younger Years.

There is a softness in the Temper of Youth, and they are yielding to the Impressions of Vice, which act directly upon the Senses; but the Influences of Virtue enter more hardly, whose Excellencies can only be discerned by some Thought and Consideration, of which they are impatient.

Therefore they are apt to be determined by the first appearances of Things; and to do wrong, rather than to be at any Pains to know what is right.

Their

Their Blood is Hot, their Spirits brisk and fine; their Limbs strong and nimble; which causes Violence in their Passions, and Rashness in their Actions, and Inconstancy in their Resolutions; they both loving and hating with little Reason.

They having had small Tryal of the Sincerity of Men, are easily deceived by fair Pretences; they having had not much Experience of the Terrors and Pangs of Conscience which follow wicked Actions, are without much difficulty betray'd into them.

And therefore, without the special Grace of God, and the extraordinary Care of their Parents and Governors, it is but little to be wondered that they should fall into many and great Sins. And those who should be wiser, too frequently countenance their Errors, by giving them soft Names, stiling their Immoral Actions but the Tricks of Youth.

Nothing therefore can more contribute to the Welfare of a Country, than the good Education of Youth.

When the Principles of true Religion are early planted in the Minds of Children, the best and most certain way is taken to make them continue Honest, Sober, and good Men all their Lives. But when they are brought up in Ignorance and Idleness, it afterwards will be much more difficult to imprint in their Minds the Love and Fear of God who created them, which is the beginning of Wisdom, and the true ground of all real Happiness.

(3.) I shall therefore conclude with all earnest Exhortations to Parents and Tutors, and Masters, to take great Care of the Education of those under their Trust ; and to young People, that they would serve God in the early part of their Lives.

God requires strictly, and Nature inclines strongly, Parents to put their Offspring in as Happy a Condition, as they are capable of. Which religious and Natural Duty will not be rightly Discharged, unless all Care be taken to instruct their Minds, as well as feed their Bodies. The Mind, being that noble Part by which we have some resemblance of God, ought chiefly to be provided for, and the Body only as it may better minister to the Soul in its Operations.

It is therefore the Principal Duty of Parents, to possess the Souls of their Children with Notions of the excellent Nature of God ; to learn them to Love, and Dread, and Worship Him ; to Pray and give Thanks Daily to Him ; to delight in Virtue, and to hate Vice ; to be Just, and Merciful, and Generous ; to exercise Patience, and endure Labour.

But for Parents to be solicitous to raise great Estates for their Children, and not to endeavour to furnish their Minds with Wisdom and Knowledge to use them ; is (saith *Plutarch*) to take Care of the Shoe, but not of the Foot which is to wear it. And yet the greatest Estate is not big enough to answer the Extravagancies and Profuseness of a vain Man.

Indeed

Indeed most of our Evils arise from the stupid Neglects of Parents. The Blasphemy, the Prophaneness publish'd in Books, and uttered in Conversation, and the Contempt of God and of Holy Things, the Disrespect of Governors, the Intemperance, Lewdness, and unnatural Lusts that forbode the heavy Judgments of God, and make the Land to Mourn; are, in a great Measure, to be traced up to a loose and wicked Education.

But if Children were taught the Fear of God betimes, and their Minds imbued with sound and honest Principles, and they were restrained from bad Things, and bad Company; and Fathers and Masters would improve them in the Art of Holy Living, as well by their own good Example, as by their wise Precepts; it would give a Turn to Things, and we might hope again to see God Reverenced, and Feared, and Honoured; the Religious encouraged, the Just defended, the Innocent upheld, and the Poor relieved; and that Righteousness might run down our Streets like Water, and Mercy and Truth flow as a mighty Stream,

Last of all, I would exhort Young People to serve God in the Strength and Flower of their Age. If they set out in a right Way, their Work would be much less; but if in a wrong one, they must turn back and begin again. If they build on a false Foundation, the whole Structure must be taken down, and cleared away, before a new one can be raised,

So that if once you part with the Innocence and Purity of your Minds, you know not what Troubles you will bring upon your selves, what Difficulties you must encounter, what Dangers you expose your Souls to. For to regain your Pure and Innocent State, you must not only change your Actions, but alter the very Course, Habits, and Customs of your Life: Nay, you must root up, even the Notions and Opinions which first misled you; you must forsake, and patiently bear all the Girds and Scoffs of your wicked Companions.

Now how know you, whether you ever shall have the Inclination and Courage, or God will allow you Opportunity, and give you Grace to undertake and finish such an extraordinary Work?

Nay, tho' you should succeed well, and recover his Favour; yet Doubts, and Scruples, and Fears may hang about you, and sting your Conscience as long as you live; and you would find in every Trouble, as *David* did, the Sins of your Youth to stare you in the Face, and affright you.

But on the contrary, how safe, how pleasant, how happy is the State of His Soul, who has persevered steddily in a Tract of Godliness and Piety, from the green Years of his Childhood!

He is, in a manner, out of the reach and danger of Temptations; it being as difficult for him to commit Sin, as for Sinners to do well.

The

The Terrors which the Plague, Famine, and War strike into the Hearts of other Men ; will scarce interrupt the well-grounded Peace, and deep Quiet of his Serene and Heavenly Mind.

And when Death it self draws near, whose approaches are so amazing to the Wicked ; it will prove to him but an occasion, more remarkably to exercise his Christian Graces ; he will exert a stronger Faith, and put forth more vigorous Acts of Love and Trust in God, desiring to be dissolved and be with Christ.

So that the greatness of his Christian Fortitude and Courage in dark and dangerous Times, as well as at the Point of Death, will be a bright Example to guide less perfect Christians by ; and a true Support to their timorous Spirits ; and they will bless God that ever they saw and knew him ; and thankfully acknowledge the seasonable Assistance they received from his Piety ; and being gone, they will have his godly Deeds in grateful Remembrance.

And when he comes to Heaven, with what Joy will the Angels and Saints embrace him ; with what Favour will the Great God receive him, whom he has serv'd with so much Faithfulness, Love, and Constancy all the Days of his Pilgrimage.

He will place him near his Throne, by his Apostles, Martyrs, and Confessors ; where he shall shine with greater Glory ; and Praise, and Worship, and Adore his God and Redeemer for ever and ever.



SERMON VIII.

ISAIAH XXX. 10.

Which say to the Seers, See not ; and to the Prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.

THE *Israelites*, from the first time God made them his own People, and took them under his particular Care, shew'd themselves to be of a distrustful, stiff, and untractable Nature. Neither the Excellency of the Government he erected over them, nor the Prosperity with which he blessed their Affairs, nor the Wonders he did for their Deliverance in Dangers so great and terrible, that they had no hope left of escaping; did uphold and secure their Belief and Trust in his good Providence, or preserve and engage their Obedience to his wise and gentle Laws.

They

They were apt to be discontented and difficult in every Trouble and Difficulty, and but small Temptations made them break the Statutes he had given them.

They are scarce got from under the Oppression and Tyranny of the *Ægyptian* King, and set free from a long Bondage, where Services neither just, nor reasonable, nor within their Power to perform, was exacted from them; but they grow weary of the Divine Authority, and mutiny under the mild and Prudent Conduct of *Moses*, and desire to return to their Oppressors, and prefer the Onions and Flesh-Pots of *Ægypt* above the Bread of Heaven.

It could hardly be thought they should so soon be reconciled to a State of Slavery, in which they did Sigh and Groan, and were deprived of the ordinary Comforts of Life; was there not an unaccountable Perverseness in the Nature of Man, when he breaks loose from his Reason.

And was it not to be seen from Instances of fresher Date, and of not so remote a distance; that Men sowed and out of humour, would chuse rather to put on their old Fetters, than not gratify their violent Passions?

It was, I say, but a very short time since God had done several Miracles, to engage their Hearts and Affections. But upon the first appearance of danger, they give up all, and quarrel with and upbraid *Moses*; notwithstanding in so marvellous a manner the Lord had disposed a great Cloud that it retarded the motion of the *Ægyptian*

tian Army, and prevented their falling on the Camp of *Israel*; but gave Light to the *Israelites*, that they moved on and continued their march. And also when the Sea had stopp'd both their Progress and further Hopes, he open'd a dry Passage thro' it for them his People, and then caused it to return to its fluid Nature, and to overwhelm their implacable Enemies, *Pharaoh* and his Host; yet upon the first Disappointment, they were for falling off from God.

So that a Chain of Miracles will no more sway the Minds of unthinking Men, than the Health, the Raiment, and the Food which every Day they receive from the Hand of their Maker.

We do not find that either they who beheld the Ten Plagues inflicted on the *Aegyptian* People, and were themselves carried out of *Aegypt* with an high Hand; or that their Children, who did hear these Miracles related by their Fathers, who had been Eye-witnesses of 'em; were more devout Worshippers of God, or did more constantly and firmly depend upon his Help in Straits and Troubles, than the Generations which next succeeded them.

For the most ample Demonstrations of the Goodness, and Wisdom, and Power of God, will not influence the Practice, and govern the Lives of Men; unless they do, what God has made Their part, deeply consider them, seriously affect Their Minds with them, and by frequent Meditation fix them in their Memory.

And

And tho' a Messenger sent from the damned, might, at present, startle wicked Men, and put them in Confusion, and make them take some Resolutions to Repent; yet the Effects of such a dreadful Message, after the Fright was over, would not be great and durable; if they who received it did endeavour to suspend the Thoughts and further Consideration of it, and to wipe out of their Minds the remembrance, of what was very grievous to them by interrupting the Course of their unlawful Pleasure.

Nay, further, the Souls of Men never keep settled at one Pitch. If the Receipt of God's Favours does not heighten their Love of his Goodness, and the Strokes of his Rod do not increase the Fears of his Power; they grow more stupid and ungrateful, and sink deeper in their Wickedness, being content to keep their Sins on any Terms, and suffering the grossest Cheats and Delusions to be put upon them.

They will say to the Seers, See not, and to the Prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.

As if they had said;

O ye Prophets, the Spiritual Overseers, Instructors, and Guides, which God has set over us; do not, according to the Duty of your Place and Office, take notice of our Sins, and reprove us for them; do not direct us to the right and just Ways of the Lord, from which, we cannot but confess, we have much erred and gone astray, but the Love we still keep for our Iniquities makes us very unwilling to return.

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We

We must acknowledge, as bad as we be, we are not arrived at such a state of Impiety, as to feel no Dissatisfaction within, from the Sense of our Crimes: We would be glad therefore to hear such Things from you, as might soften and diminish the fearful Apprehensions we have of the Guilt of our Evil Doings, and smooth and allay the Ruffles and Tempests Sin raises in our Breasts. We so much desire something to make our Minds easy, and stand in such need of it, that it would be acceptable and grateful to us, tho' only by a false Gloss put upon our naughty Behaviour, and a deceitful Misrepresentation of the ill Condition of our Souls, you could silence and stupify our Consciences, and screen from our Sight those dangerous Precipices whither our Sins do directly hurry us, which, when we behold them, do fill us with Horror and Despair. *Speak unto us smooth things, and prophesy Deceits.* From these Words of the Prophet, we have a fair occasion to make some Reflections,

(1.) On the troublesome and uneasy Condition of Sinners.

(2.) On the Folly and Unreasonableness of the Ways by which they expect to ease and quiet themselves.

(3.) On the Danger of deceiving Men in the great Affair of everlasting Salvation.

(1.) We are to reflect on the disquiet and uneasy Condition of Sinners, which is implied in

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in the Text ; for they would not have desired the Seers to be blind and silent, had not the hearing of those Crimes, which they saw and observed, been irksome and grievous. They would not have spoke against the Prophets giving a true and exact Account of the Will and Law of God ; if the reminding them of their Neglect of some Duties, and their Breach of others, had not cut and girded their Minds.

But before we further proceed, it may be fit to premise,

(1.) That no Qualifications in Men can secure them from all Troubles in this World. The Righteous have their Share in Afflictions ; Afflictions are often necessary for them ; By Sufferings they much advance their Interest in Spiritual Affairs, and improve and strengthen the Virtuous Dispositions of their Souls.

Besides, they cannot, without a Miracle, be exempted from taking part of publick Calamities: Unseasonable Weather, Infections in the Air, Inundations, or Fires, cast their Evil Influences upon all, without making any Difference. And there will be no avoiding, some time or other, more or less, the bad Effects of the Pride, Anger, Malice, or Covetousness of Wicked Men.

(2.) That Wicked Men are often observed to flourish ; that their frequent Prosperity has been apt sometimes to stagger the Faith of sincere Be-

believers, and is one of the most specious Objections against Providence.

But the Answer is, That they are not the Happy Men they seem to be, and that much Alloy and Bitterness will be found to incorporate with their sweetest Pleasures.

(3.) That the Wicked are not always made Miserable according to the Proportion of their Crimes; but Little Sinners suffer when Great ones escape: Which is an undeniable Proof of a future Judgment, God reserving the Weight and Extremity of Punishment for Them to the last.

But after these Observations premised, it will be evident that Sin has a natural Tendency to the Destruction of Men; and that it does rob and deprive them of all true Peace and Contentment of Mind.

For whatever makes a Breach between God and his Creatures, as all Sin does, and causes him of a Tender Father to become a Severe Judge; of a Gracious and Almighty Patron, who was always doing good to us, and defending us from Harm and Injuries, to become an enraged and irresistible Enemy ready to consume us; so that we who placed our Trust wholly in his Providence, live in perpetual Fear of being destroyed by his Power; and we who with well grounded Assurance pray'd for our Daily Bread and Deliverance from all Evil, dare not now so much as look up towards Heaven: Whatever thus changes our
Hopes

Hopes of God's Mercy into dreadful Expectations of his Judgment, must terribly disturb and perplex the Minds of Men.

Whatsoever does set the rest of the World against us, and exposes us to Contempt, Shame, Hatred, and Punishment; what lets Civil Laws loose upon us, and deprives us of Ease, of Liberty, of Limbs and Life it self, which is the genuine Fruit of many Vices; must needs cast Men into a State of Disquietude and Anxiety.

In a Word, what does Injury both to Body and Mind; what breaks the Health and Strength of the Constitution, and blunts the Quickness and Vigor of the Understanding; what does sink and enfeeble all the Powers and Faculties Spiritual and Corporal, setting a Man at Variance with himself, enslaving him to the Tyrannical Commands of unruly and opposite Passions; must, of necessity, render his Condition Miserable and Comfortless: And yet these Calamities and Punishments, God and Nature have annexed to our Iniquities. *A wicked Soul shall destroy him that bath it.* Eccl. 6. 4.

But if you will carry the Thought still further, and consider, that Wickedness breeds in Men dreadful Notions of Death, and makes them tremble at the Prospect of their latter End, and that all just and lively Representations of a future Tryal at the Bar of Heaven, do terrify and amaze them; it must be granted, that there are no grounds for Peace and Satisfaction to the Wicked.

Now we proceed in the
(2^d Place) To make some Reflections on the
Folly and Unreasonableness of the Ways and
Remedies, by which Impenitent Sinners expect to
relieve and quiet their Minds.

They desire to be kept in Ignorance, both
of their Duty, and their Faults; and either not
to hear of their Transgressions, or to have them
represented less than they are.

Is not this for Men to seek present Ease or
Satisfaction, upon the most unreasonable and
senseless Terms that can be imagined? For can
any Ease or Remission of Trouble or Pain be less
to be courted or esteemed, than that which pro-
ceeds from mere Ignorance of the great Danger
which is near us; or at least, from an imperfect
and fraudulent Account of it; from whence we
may apprehend but little Hurt, when we are
at the point of losing all that is dear and va-
luable to us: which is mere Foolhardiness?

For this is nothing but to wish, that the
Hook may be covered with a Bait, or that the
Poison we are ready to swallow, should be wrapt
in Honey; so that our Destruction may come
without warning, and we Perish when we are
delighting our selves with the deceitful Pleasures
of Sin.

It is strange, that Men which take such Care
of the Business of the World, and are solicitous
about Niceties and Trifles, should be contented
easily to be cheated of their Souls, and to for-
feit their Hopes of Heaven for the Use of such
Things

Things, as do not yield true Comfort to them in this Life.

In less Matters Men will not pretend to impose on others, unless they have a mean Opinion of 'em, and do in some Measure despise them; and they that are put upon, should they discover it, will hardly forgive the Person that over-reached them.

But with what Patience, if not with Delight, can they hear the Truth and Credit of all Religion called in question, or the Principles and Duties of true Religion so falsely stated and misrepresented, that they shall little avail to make them better or wiser Men!

Do we not too often hear of Conversations, where it passes for Evidence of a Man's deep Sense and good Understanding, boldly to assert the Eternity of the World, or to ascribe the Original of it to Chance; that God does not rule the World, or regard what is done in it; that their Souls and Bodies will perish together, and that they never shall be brought into Judgment in the next State, for the Iniquities they have done in this?

The venting such horrid Blasphemies, is to *Speak smooth things* to obstinate Sinners; but it is also to *prophecy deceits*, which will utterly undo them.

For if we look about, we every where may discern the great and wonderful Strokes of God's Providence, in the upholding, and continuance, and good order of the World: Among all the Ranks of Creatures, the Divine Bounty does di-

distinctly appear, and every particular Man, in the course of his own Life, may plainly perceive unquestionable Marks of God's Wisdom, numerous Instances of his Goodness, and merciful Tokens of his Care.

And if we enter into the consideration of our Soul and Body, we may be satisfy'd that the Notions we have of them are widely different; we cannot but observe our Body to consist of Parts easy to be divided, and let loose from one another; and if neither outward Violence nor Diseases do destroy it, yet a little time will make it moulder away. Whereas no Signs of Dissolution or Decay are found in the Conceptions we have of our Mind: And as in the Idea of the Soul, all the Notes of incorruption and immortality do discover themselves, so the Appetite and Desire of living for ever is inseparable from it; and could therefore only be planted in the Soul, by that God who gave it Existence.

There are those who pretend to believe in God, that however can give kind Entertainment to such Doctrines as reflect great dishonour upon God, and which will be pernicious to themselves in the conduct of their Religious Affairs, if their Practice be agreeable to their Belief:

For they are pleased to hear any thing like a Reason, to prove there is a Fate which sways our Wills, and that all our Actions are necessary and unavoidable, and that God is the Author of our sins.

Whereas the Deliberation these Men use before they go about a Work, the great Precauti-

ons

ons they take in matters of Consequence, the sharp Reflections they make on their own Mis-carriages, and the Shame that appears in their Countenances after they have done foolish and wicked things, are so many Demonstrations of the Liberty and Freedom of their Acts; and that God neither forces, nor does so much as tempt any Man to evil; but that a Man is enticed and drawn aside by his own Lust, and that his evil Deeds all proceed from his naughty Heart.

These are some Instances, and it would not be hard to produce many more of the smooth, but unwholsome and deadly Means, with which im-penitent Sinners have endeavour'd to suppress the Clamours of Conscience. For they have met with false Guides and Friends for their turn, who have particularly accommodated themselves to their vicious Inclinations.

Some have confounded the Truth of Religion with their *Additions*, and corrupted the Purity of it by superstitious Mixtures, which they have declared to be of equal Authority and Obligation with the Doctrines and Precepts delivered from God himself.

For how many are there, calling themselves Christians, who give as much Faith and Credit to the Modern Opinions and Traditions of a *Body of Men* that assume infallibility to themselves, but modestly deny it to all out of their own inclosure; as they do the old Principles and Rules of Religion taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles? and with as much assurance ground the hopes of their Salvation upon Con-fession

cession and the Absolution of the Priest, or on an Indulgence from the Head of their Church, the Pope; as on sincere Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel? And hope the defects of their own Piety may be supplied by the Works of Supererogation of other Men, Sinners like themselves?

But we shall wonder the less at Mens believing and acting with so little Reason, when we reflect, that in the Church where these things take place; the Holy Scriptures, which are the lively Oracles of God, and do contain all matters plainly, of necessity either to be believed or practised; are locked up from the People in an unknown Tongue.

If the Laws of God were made publick, which is necessary to their having a Power to oblige; so many would not so easily be smoothly deluded with vain deceits, that cannot reasonably contribute to the ease of their guilty Minds in this World, or to their Happiness in the next.

(3.) We are to make some Reflections on the Danger of deceiving Men in the great Affair of everlasting Salvation.

The Danger will be very great, both to the Ministers who teach false Notions concerning God and Religion, and deliver short and defective Measures of Obedience to their Hearers; and also to the poor People that are betray'd by their Deceits.

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This Trust is of the highest Nature; and God does look for Care, Exactness, and Circumspection in the Execution of it, suitable to the Dignity thereof. For as nothing can be so fatal to Men, as to neglect or mislead them from the right way to Heaven; so They must expect to perish themselves, who are the Cause of other Mens Destruction.

The Mind of God is clearly opened in this Point; *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely dye; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand,* Ezek. 3. 17, 18.

It is then the indispensable Duty of the Seers and Guides the Lord has placed over his Church, to instruct, admonish, reprove, direct and comfort, as there shall be occasion, the several Members of it.

(1.) Which Office they must discharge with great Constancy; not looking on it as a business by the by, to be done by fits and starts, uncertainly, according as they are in humour, and free from the Affairs of the World, and their Pleasures and Diversions will admit.

But it must be the perpetual Employment and the great Work of their Lives; they ought to preserve in themselves a constant steady Disposition to do good to the Souls of Men; they must ever be
ready

ready and watch for favourable Opportunities of reclaiming the wicked, and of supporting the weak, and encouraging their Religious Progress. They must apply themselves to Offenders when they are in private; when their Passions are down; when they are afflicted, sick, or in disgrace; and demonstrate to them the natural Connexion between their Sins and their Sufferings.

They must take the Advantage of the good Humour that Persons are put in by any unexpected Blessing or Success in their Affairs, and convince them how proper a Season it is to make Restitution for Wrongs, to shew Mercy, to forgive Injuries, and to do Works of Piety.

(2.) And as all Opportunities are to be taken, so all Arguments are to be used, and press'd with the greatest force and vigor to gain Men to Christ. The deceitfulness of Sin, the vanity of the Creature, the shortness and uncertainty of Life, are to be set forth.

The Patience, the Long-suffering, and the Goodness of God, are to be display'd to timorous and desponding Christians, to secure them from Despair; and the hardened, prophane, and stupid Offenders are to be awaken'd, converted, and persuaded by lively representations of the Judgments and Terrors of the Lord.

(3.) In Performance of this most weighty Employment, great Sincerity is required. When we are engaged in our Pastoral Office; both what we say, and what we do, should proceed from our Hearts in Truth and Simplicity; and we should

should set nothing before our Eyes, but the Honour and Glory of God, and the Safety and Happiness of Men.

And where the Intentions are sincere, and all secular and sinister Designs separated from the Performance, we may be secure of plain and faithful dealing. Nothing false, nothing hurtful, nothing needless or superfluous will be imposed, nor any thing necessary for the good of the Soul omitted.

(4.) Lastly, if Zeal and Love accompany our endeavours to advance Godliness and Virtue, there will be much probability of their succeeding well. A Zeal for the Happiness of others, will animate us with Courage to encounter Dangers in delivering them; it will inspire Resolution to break thro' Difficulties, and to endure both Pains and Labour to further their diligence and speed in the Christian Race which they have undertaken to run.

If our Actions proceed from Love, we shall grudge no Expence, stick at no Trouble, and decline no Hardship, to save the Souls, in the Day of the Lord Jesus, of those over whom we have the charge.

And when we are found gently and kindly to lead them in the only Paths that tend to Heaven, they will be disposed to hear our Voice, and to obey our Directions.

Let us but persevere patiently to silence Gainers, and to bring them over to the Truth, reproving them with the Spirit of Meekness; and never cease earnestly to press Men to Repen-

Repentance, with decent and tender Expressions, but strong and unanswerable Arguments; and so we may well hope, thro' the Grace of God concurring with us, to reap a plentiful Harvest.

But if neither Clear Instructions, nor Wise Reproofs, nor Importunate Exhortations, nor Affectionate Perswasions will prevail with Men to do their Duty, and to abhor and forsake their Sins: they shall die in their Iniquity; but the Prophets and Messengers of God, have delivered their own Souls.

I would beg leave to end this Discourse with a hearty Address to all Persons, to take into serious Consideration the Condition of their own Souls, and to enquire thereby upon what Terms they stand, in respect of Death and Judgment. Without a full Information of the particular Duties God does require from every one of us in our several Ranks and Capacities, and without comparing strictly the Actions of our Lives with the Rules of our Duty, we can have no true Knowledge of our own State, much less can we be assured of the safety of our Immortal Spirits.

It does become Men professing True Wisdom and Baptized into the Religion of Christ, not to be ignorant of a Matter only necessary to be known, whereon does depend their everlasting Dwelling in Heaven or Hell.

No body undertakes a Voyage, or goes a Journey, without being desirous to know where it will End; and yet we behold the greater
Number

Number to press forward without Thought or Concern, whether their Behaviour in this present Passage will carry and determine them to a State of the greatest Happiness or extremest Misery.

The Arts are well studied how to subsist in the World, and to fence against the tolerable Troubles of a short Life: But are not most Men so horribly Stupid as to use no fore-cast, and to make no Provision against entering into a Condition of infinite and endless Evils?

Is it not time to break off the Company that has flattered us in our Sins, and intercepted the prospect of Danger; seeing nothing but Wickedness can cause a Man's Heart to misgive him, and to make him become a burden to himself?

And it is not the Pain of Death, which Men often voluntarily expose themselves to; but the Fear of what shall come after it, that is so terrible to Sinners.

And shall we not, by the help of God, prepare our Souls by an entire Reformation of our Thoughts and Manners, for that State after Death?

For howsoever we did employ our selves in the Month, the Week, or the Day that is past; it is certain we have made so many steps nearer to our Death; which is perpetually approaching us, at how great a distance soever we place it from us, how much soever we slight it, how little soever we think of it and provide for its coming; And we daily see Persons fall by its Stroke,

Stroke, that had once fair probabilities, from their Youth and Strength, to have outlived us.

Now nothing can arm us against the Fears of Death, but Reconciliation with God. Nothing can Reconcile us to God, but Repentance and Amendment; we must truly Repent, and unfeignedly believe his Holy Gospel. We are not safe, if we delay our Repentance any longer.

Nothing can more compleat our Reformation, nor secure our Perseverance in the Holy State; than Daily Devout Prayers offered up to God; which evidence our Belief of his Power, Goodness, and Wisdom; which declare our Dependance upon his Providence, his Mercy, and Assistance. But he that does not Pray, cuts off his Relation to God, and has no Body to fly to in distress.

But having once recovered the Favour of God, by a new and Holy Life made acceptable thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ, and put our selves under his Protection; Death will lose its Sting and all its Terrors.

Thus Innocence and Purity of Conversation, as they are the greatest Blessings God does give, and the Supports and Ornaments of the present Life; so they are the only true Comforts against Death.

I conclude with the words of King David, and some of the Son of Sirach: *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last. As for the transgressors, they shall perish together; and the end of the ungodly is, they shall be rooted out*
at

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at the last. But the Salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord; who is also their Strength in the time of trouble; and the Lord shall stand by them and save them, because they put their trust in him.

Before Judgment examine thy self, and in the day of visitation thou shalt find mercy.

Humble thy self before thou be sick, and in the time of sins shew repentance.

Let nothing binder thee to pay thy vow in due time; and defer not until death to be justified, Ecclus. 18. 20, 21.

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SER.



SERMON IX.

JAMES I. 15.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

MANY have been the Enquiries how Sin came into the World; and the most sagacious and inquisitive Men have much puzzled themselves about it. It may be observ'd that they have given such Accounts of the beginning and rise of evil, as might remove it from their own Doors. And some have been so far transported beyond all Reason and Sense, as to make God the Author of their Sins.

Which wicked Opinion St. *James* does expose, ver. 13. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any man:*

i. e.

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i. e. it being essential to the Nature of God to be infinitely Good ; you must yield that it is impossible, either that he himself should be tempted to do an Evil Thing, or that he should tempt others to it.

It is the greatest Impudence and highest Blasphemy, to affirm, that a Being compleatly Perfect should be the Cause of Sin. For it would take away the Nature of Sin, which would not be Sin, neither essentially Evil in it self, nor unpleasing to God, was it the Work of his own Hands. But can we conceive that God should bring Evil into the World, which is most opposite to the Holiness and Purity of his Nature ; and be offended with Men, and Punish them for doing those Things, which are the direct Effects of his own Will and Decrees ?

The Holy Scripture most truly relates unto us how Sin first appeared. God Created Man after his own Image, gave him a Power over his Actions, whereby he became capable of Rewards, if he used this Power well ; and liable to Punishments, if he misused the Liberty and Freedom God had bestowed upon him. *St. James* very particularly opens to us the Way whereby Sin makes its entry into the World, ver. 14. *But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed.* The Devil may Tempt, and the Wicked may Importune, and the Baits of the World may entice Men to do Evil ; but neither the Powers on Earth, or in Hell, tho' they join their Strength together, can force a Man to Sin, or Rob him of his Innocence, unless

less his Will Consent, and he yield to the Solicitation of his own Lust.

And in our Text, we have a Relation of all the steps that are taken to the producing of Sin. *Then when Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: and Sin when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.* By Lust we understand the sensual Appetite; by its conceiving, we understand the Act of the Will consenting unto the Sin, to which it was tempted by the lower Appetite; by bringing forth Sin, must be understood the doing of the Evil Action unto which the Will had consented, and by the words, *when Sin is finished, it bringeth forth Death*; must be meant, that when Men live in customary habitual Practice of those Sins, unto which they had consented; this Course of Life will Destroy them, and end in Eternal Death.

But to look a little more particularly into the meaning of this Word *Lust*, which is here supposed to be the Parent of Sin. By Lust we are to apprehend the sensual or lower Appetites in Men, which stand distinguish'd from the higher Faculties of the Soul, the Understanding and Will.

The Greek Word here for Lust, *Suidas* explains by *ἄλογος ἐρεξίς*, the irrational Appetite, or the Appetites which have not their Beginning from Reason, but often run counter to it. *St. Paul* is more express, when he calls them the *Lusts of the Flesh*, i. e. those Appetites or Motions in us, caused by the close Union of the
Flesh

Flesh to the Spirit, or of the Body to the Soul.

Which are the same Things we mean by the *Passions* or Affections, such as Joy, Grief, Hope, Fear, Love, Hatred, Desire, Aversion, and the like. In all these Instances, the Soul does Act; but these Acts of hers are attended with an extraordinary Commotion of the Animal Spirits in the Body, which makes an Impression upon her.

Lust then taken in a large Signification, does comprehend all the Passions (it being *τὸ ἐκ φύσεως κίνησις*, as *Phavorinus* calls it:) But strictly used, it signifies Desire; And when the Word Lust or Desire in the Scripture is applied in an ill Sense, then either the Desire is placed upon an ill Object; or, in too high Degrees, and more than the Things Deserve, it is set upon a good one.

To be as plain as I can, Lust or Desire is not Good or Evil in it self; but Good, when it is directed to a Good Thing or Object; and Evil, when it is fixed upon a bad one, or when it is carried out too violently toward some Good, without which yet it might do well; For this Violence in the Passion of Desire, gives great Disturbance to the Mind, and is apt to pervert and blind the Judgment.

And this follows plainly from our Text. *St. James* makes the Sin not to consist in the Lust or Desire, but in the Act of its conceiving: So that Lust, before it has conceived, *i. e.* before it has the Consent of the Will, is not Sin. *For then when it has conceived, it brings forth Sin.*

There are two Things that I design: The *first* is for the Comfort of Weak and Disconsolate Christians, who think God has cast them off, because they find Thoughts sometimes to rise in their Minds. And the *other* is to shew by what little steps Sin creeps upon Men, and first deceives, and then hardeneth them.

There are many good People, who are much grieved, and think themselves in a lost Condition, because they have sometimes very blasphemous Thoughts concerning God come into their Minds; and because at other Times they feel in themselves sudden Motions to do the Deeds of Darkness; but they are so far from yielding to these unaccountable Motions, that it is the greatest Trouble and Sorrow of their Souls that they are disturbed with them.

Now from the Text we may infer for their Advantage, the following Doctrine: That Lust or Desire, or the first Inclinations in the Mind to Things Unlawful, are not properly Sins, or do not put on the Nature of Guilt, so as Men shall be condemned for them; though, if we yield or consent to them, they will certainly conceive and bring forth Sin.

Desire (I say) or the first Inclinations in the Mind to Things unlawful, are not properly Sins, or do not put on the Nature of Guilt, so as Men shall be condemned for them. What I say here, must be understood of the first Motions in the Mind, which the Will is yet so remote from cherishing, that it hath not in any little Degree yielded unto them: Further, what

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is now affirmed, must also be understood of the first Motions of Pure Nature, and not of those filthy and unnatural Lusts and Desires, which Men by Evil Customs and Wicked Lives have contracted and superadded to Nature. Now that the first Desires of the Mind to forbidden Things, thus explained, are not Sins; and that God will not Impute them to us, and Condemn us for them; will appear from the following Reasons.

(1.) Because these Desires and Motions are natural; for such is the Nature of Man, if a Thing appears pleasing to him, he must desire it; but if it appears Dangerous and Hurtful, he must fly from it. Therefore every Object which does present it self to the Senses of a Man, will raise a Passion in him which is peculiar to the Qualities and Condition of that Object.

If the Object be delightful, it will stir up the Passion of Love and Desire to possess it: But if it be ungrateful, it will Work upon the Passion of Hatred, and he will do what he can to avoid it. To the very Frame therefore of our Nature it is due, that we are inclined to some Things, and that we are averse to others.

But what proceeds directly from our Nature, as these Passions and Appetites do, must come from God, who is the Author of Nature, and would not have placed them in us, had they been Sinful, or capable of no good Use.

But we must take Notice, that the same God who gave us such Appetites, has also given us Rules to govern them by; and in several Cases,

has forbidden our Compliance with the Inclinations of Nature : And from hence proceeds the War between the Flesh and Spirit ; the Flesh does move us to comply with it in some of those Instances, which God has forbidden.

So that it is plain, that God by the Law he has given, did not intend to destroy the Appetites of Nature, which he would have done were they Evil in themselves ; but to restrain and inclose them in due Bounds, and to teach us how to order them to good purposes.

On the contrary, to make these Appetites or Desires, which stick so inseparably to our Nature, to be Crimes ; is to make a Crime of our being Men, compounded of Flesh and Spirit. Wherefore a Man's Sin does not lie in this, that he has such Desires or first Motions in his Mind ; but in his yielding to them, when they prompt him to something that is contrary to the Law of God.

This will be evident by an Example : That Beauty should please the Eye, or Wine the Palate, are no Sins : For it Amounts to no more than this, that the Senses are delighted with these Objects, which Nature has contrived to please them. But all the Sin will lie in the after-Act : if Men so far yield to the first Motions, as to become willing to defile their Neighbour's Bed, or to Drink the Wine to Excess, then they Sin. The first Motion was the Inclination of Nature ; but the consenting to this Motion in Cases which God had forbidden, depended upon the Will, and

and was therefore Matter of Freedom and Choice, and consequently Sinful.

(2.) These first Motions to forbidden Things are not Sins, because they are unavoidable, where the greatest Care has been used to prevent them. And this may be gathered from the unaccountable Manner, in which they put forth themselves. There frequently being nothing more unaccountable or unperceivable, than the beginnings of Motion in the Soul, either towards Objects Lawful or Unlawful.

For sometimes a Revengeful Thought, sometimes an Ambitious Wish, will enter the Mind of a Man he knows not how, nor by what Means. He neither perceived the Beginning of these Thoughts, nor can give any Reason, why at that Time, and in that Place, they came. How many Thousand Fancies every Day start up in Mens Heads, either Vain, Trifling, Absurd, and Ridiculous; or Impure, Malicious or Prophane; without any Concurrence of the Will to their Birth, and which the strictest Guard could not have hindred?

But certainly God will not look upon Men as Sinners, and punish them for the involuntary Motions and Workings in their Minds, unto which they gave no Consent.

For that an Action should be sinful, it is requisite, as well that it should proceed from the Will, as be against God's Law: But Who ever pretended his Will to have so entire a mastery over his Thoughts, as to be able to keep them wholly

wholly from wandering but the least space of Time? Common Experience does demonstrate, that this is not in any Man's Power.

But if he puts a stop to his straying Thoughts, as soon as he is sensible of them; he does as much as a sincere Christian can: And the good and merciful Lord will not treat him as a Criminal, for those things he had no power to prevent.

(3.) These Appetites and first Motions are not sinful; because unless there were Appetites in our Nature to Things which God has prohibited, there could be no way to discover our Sincerity in God's Service. For if we had no inclination and tendency in us to unlawful Things, we could have no temptation to offend God, and so there could be no Experiment made of our Piety and Virtue.

The Nature of Virtue consisting in our resisting the natural Motions to such Things and Actions, as God has forbidden: If these Appetites were pull'd up by the Root out of our Nature, no Ground would be left for the exercise of our Virtue, nor any Means remaining to prove our Faithfulness to God, and that our Obedience is unfeigned and proceeds from the Heart; So that God, on purpose, first placed such Inclinations in our Minds, and then limited them by wise Laws, that he might make a fair Tryal, whether we would live in Conformity to his Precepts, or give up our selves to the Motions of our own Appetites. Wherefore to govern these Appetites by the Holy Rules we have receiv'd from Heaven,

ven, is the great Business and Duty enjoyn'd us by the Christian Religion.

Neither have we any other way to manifest our love to God, and fidelity to his Cause; than by stoutly withstanding every Motion of our Flesh in all unlawful Instances.

(4.) These first Desires and Inclinations are no Sins, because they have been in all Men, tho' never so innocent: They were in *Adam* before he did Fall; and they were found in our blessed Saviour who never fell. For if these Inclinations were not in *Adam* before his Fall, he never had been liable to be tempted; they being, as I have now shewn, the Ground of all Temptation: And had *Adam* not been obnoxious to Temptation, it would be impossible he ever should have fallen.

The first Motion in *Adam's* Mind, was, to be pleased with the Beauty of the Fruit; but he had not sinned, unless his Will had consented to his eating of that Fruit after he knew it was forbidden. The Holy Scripture makes his Sin to lye, not in his Eyes being delighted with what was lovely; but in his yielding to do what God had prohibited.

Then as to our ever Blessed and most Holy Redeemer, it is apparent that he had the same Appetites and first Tendencies in his Nature which other Men have, altho' he never suffer'd them to betray him into the least Sin. Of this we have a very remarkable instance in the Prayer he made before his Passion, *That the cup, if it*
was

was possible, might pass from him. The first Motions in his Mind were, to wish and pray that he might escape the bitterness of that Death, which God had decreed he should Suffer; and which was the highest and most glorious instance he could give, of his Obedience and Submission to the Will of his Father.

But these first Motions of his Soul, which inclined him vehemently to desire that he might not die, but that the dismal Hour and Cup might pass by him; only prevailed upon him to put up a conditional Prayer for a Reprieve, if it was agreeable to the Will of God.

For notwithstanding the first Tendencies of Nature were for longer Life, yet he fully submits his own Will in this Point, to the Will of his Father. So that notwithstanding there were in Christ such Inclinations, Appetites, and Desires, as are common to Men, and without which he could not have been tempted in all Points as we are; yet they being reduced to an absolute Submission to the Pleasure of God, could not stain his Righteous Soul with the lightest Tincture or Degree of Guilt; which yet unavoidably they must do, if in their own Nature they had been sinful.

(5.) We may argue that God will not look upon the first Motions of our Passions as Sins, in that they depend, in a great measure, on the Body. It is to the very Constitutions of our Bodies, that the beginning of many of these Motions is owing: Some of them are to be charged on

on the briskness of florid Blood ; and some of them proceed from the grossness and difficulty of Motion in the Animal Spirits ; and some from other natural and mechanical Causes. And it is no more in our Power to change or alter the Constitution of our Bodies, than it is to keep them in Health.

If then these first Inclinations do to a great degree depend upon our bodily Constitution, that is, upon a Cause over which we can have but little influence ; it will follow, that notwithstanding it is our infirmity to be troubled with them, yet it is no Sin in us that we are not free from them.

Thus we often see it fall to the Lot of good People, who have the fear of God constantly dwelling in their Hearts, to be miserably perplex'd with Evil Thoughts ; which, like Arrows, dart into their Souls, even when they are in the midst of their Prayers, or are performing some other solemn Duty of Religion.

Here these Thoughts strangely surprize them they know not how, and give them great disturbance, and interrupt the sweet Pleasure they largely felt in their Devotions ; and they are much afraid, that they grievously provoke God thereby ; whereas all this cloud of dismal and terrifying Thoughts, is mainly to be imputed to the unhappiness of their bodily Constitution : And God will no more punish them for having such Thoughts, than for having such Bodies which are the true Cause of them.

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And notwithstanding God sometimes may suffer Holy Persons, by the weight of such frightful Thoughts, to be sadly dejected and cast down, even to the depths of Despair; yet for all that, these afflicted Saints do not stand one degree lower in his Affection and Esteem, and he will find a fit time largely to recompence all their Sorrows for his Sake and Cause.

One Man's Sanguine Complexion may stir up unclean Desires; the Choler of another Man's Temper, may cause sudden Motions of Revenge; the Melancholy of a third Man, may cast in Thoughts tempting him to despair of God's Mercy, and to do Violence to himself; and yet the Persons affected with these Disorders may be real good Men, and not yield up their innocence in any one of these Points.

That which they have to do, when these Thoughts either single, or in a multitude, break in upon them; is not solely to afflict and torment themselves; for that will do no good; but immediately to oppose them, to run from them, and to refuse in any sort to comply with them.

And so they will vanish of themselves as they came, and never can be dangerous, unless we entertain them, and dwell upon them, and enliven and cherish them by some degrees of consent.

But before I come to a conclusion of my Argument, let me observe,

(1.) That these first Tendencies and Desires which be merely natural, and shall not be laid to
our

our Charge as Crimes for which we shall suffer ; may grow heady, more frequent, and more violent, and be more importunate to be satisfy'd, by an ill Life : And that the frequency, violences, and importunity of these first Desires to forbidden things, which Men bring upon Nature by a Custom of sinning, and are the effect of having enslav'd themselves to their Lusts ; must be held sinful, and will, without Repentance, bring Punishment upon the Offender.

(2.) I observe, that notwithstanding no Man can live without these Desires and Appetites, yet he may in some measure restrain and lessen them. And in order to this, observe from what Cause they do most usually come. Set a careful guard over all your Senses, and turn them away from those Objects and Things, which did most frequently stir them up in your Minds : For you can hardly be innocent, when every small occasion does raise them, and make them troublesome ; and much less when they are set a work by any Sin, to which you accustom yourselves.

(3.) Notwithstanding we ought to keep these Appetites and first Inclinations under, as much as we are able ; yet observe, that your greatest care ought to be employ'd about your Will, over which God has given you full power, that it do not consent and submit unto them when they entice you to Evil.

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The Laws of God are all made to Rule those Actions of ours which proceed from our Will; and if we fail here, certainly our Innocence will be lost, and our Consciences will accuse and condemn us. Therefore we should keep a strict and constant watch upon our Will: it should be our main Care, that it do not comply with unlawful Temptations. And when it has failed in the discharge of its Duty, we should grieve for the offence committed against God: We should humble our selves before him, and heartily beseech him to forgive us; and live with an exacter and more conscientious regard to our Behaviour for the time to come.

(4.) As for you, good Christians, who have the fear of God constantly upon your Spirits, who frame your Lives according to the Precepts of the Gospel of your ever Blessed Master, and do not allow your selves in the Custom of any gross Sin; but, for all that, are exceedingly troubled, and think your Case dangerous, because evil Thoughts start up in your Minds, altho' you do not consent to them, and they do not bring forth any sin, and you do your best to check and stifle them. As for your sakes chiefly I design'd this Discourse, so let me say this for your Comfort and Support, that you are by no means in that bad condition which you apprehend of your selves; and that your Danger is not real, but lieth most in your own Fancy and Opinion. No Body, more than you, does deserve the Compassion of Christians; For these Scruples of

of yours, make you have indeed disconsolate Hearts, and fill you with sorrowful and sad Reflections upon the State of your Souls; so that you are ready to be cover'd and swallow'd up with Despair: But nevertheless you certainly will go to Heaven, tho' you carry about you here so many fearful Surmises that you shall go astray and be lost: You will in the end find everlasting Peace, Quiet, and Joy, notwithstanding you meet with so little of them upon the Way, and have no more assurance of them in this Life.

For, Temptations in your Souls to the greatest Sins, will not cast you out of God's Favour, so long as you do not commit the Sins unto which you are tempted:

For this is nothing but the lusting of the Flesh against the Spirit, as St. *Paul* speaks; but the Flesh does not prevail, for you do not yield to its wicked Motions.

Ye do not therefore fulfil the Lusts of the Flesh, because you abstain from the Works of the Flesh, Adultery, Fornication, Uncleaness, and such like: You are so far from polluting your selves with the Commission of any of these vile and abominable Sins, that nothing terrifies you so much, as that you sometimes find the least Tendencies to them, which as soon as ever you observe, you manfully resist and abhor them.

To conclude: God suffers all this to come upon you, to prove your Faith, to try your Patience, and to convince the wicked how faithful his Servants are to his Interest and Cause, even

in a comfortless and afflicted State: So that you ought to look upon this terrifying melancholy Tryal, unto which the Divine Providence does suffer you to be exposed, to be but a Token of his Love, and an undoubted Mark of the Care he has of your Soul, which he does not suffer to be betray'd into any great Sin; and that he will at last bountifully Reward all your Sufferings on the account of Religion.

Do not therefore thus grieve, at these first Motions to Evil; which sometimes spring up in your Souls, and against which there is no Remedy: For God will never pass Sentence of Death upon you for them, so long as you do not fulfil them, and comply with them.

It is your Duty to oppose them manfully, to pray against all Submission of your Wills unto them, and to trust in God for sufficient Assistance; and having committed all your weighty Affairs about this and the next Life to his infinite Goodness and Wisdom, to possess your Souls with Patience; and there can be no doubt but in the end you shall be more than Conquerors.

Which God of his infinite Goodness grant we all may be.

S E R-



SERMON X.

EPHESIANS V. II.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful Works of darkness ; but rather reprove them.

 *St.* Paul begins this Chapter with a general Exhortation, that they would be Followers of God as dear Children. That they would Follow and Obey the Will of God, and endeavour to be like him in those Perfections of his Nature which are imitable by us. That their Diligence to approach nearer to the Nature of God should be such, as became dear Children, who had a tender Regard to the Will of their Parents, and an high Concern to please them.

He also exhorts them to Walk in Love ; that in their Conversation with their Brethren, their Actions should be such as proceeded from Love,

as might appear from the general Inclination they had to advance their Good and Welfare. And to this Charitable Behaviour he moves them from the Example of Christ, who hath *loved us, and hath given himself for us, as an Offering and a Sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling Savour.* Christ offered up himself to God, to pacify his Anger against us Offenders.

Which Sacrifice had a sweet-smelling Savour, *i. e.* was well-pleasing to God, who was so gracious as to accept it in our stead, who were bound to have made Satisfaction to the Divine Justice for our Crimes.

Then he reckons up divers deadly Sins, which draw the Wrath of God upon Men, and which will shut them out of Heaven; and forbids their Allowance of them in any little Degree. Ver. 3. *But Fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named amongst you, as becometh Saints.* It does in no wise become Saints to have the Names of Fornicators, Unclean or Covetous Persons, or so much as to come under the Suspicion of being Guilty of any of these Sins.

And of this he gives a good Reason: *For this ye know, that no Whoremonger, nor unclean Person, nor covetous Man, who is an Idolater, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God,* ver. 5.

For those who customarily do any of these Vile and Heinous Sins, by defacing the Image of God do render themselves utterly incapable of an Inheritance, after this Life, in the Kingdom

dom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and God his Father; where none may appear but in White Robes, and whose Iniquities are wash'd away with the Blood of the immaculate Lamb.

In the next Verse he draws a Conclusion from the Reasons he had offer'd, why no Man should allow himself in those Sins. *Let no Man deceive you with vain words : For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the Children of Disobedience, Ver. 6. i. e.* Let no Man so far impose upon your Understanding, with vain, witty, or plausible Speeches, as to make you fancy that these abominable Crimes are but the Frailties of Nature, which God will not severely Punish : For the Children of Disobedience, who break the Laws which he has made against these particular Sins, do openly pull down Judgments upon their Heads, which are the Effects of God's Wrath and heavy Displeasure. And the better to avoid and shun such Deceits, he cautions them in the Text, *to have no fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknefs.*

Then he urges them not to partake with Men in any of these notorious Wickednesses, from the Consideration of the Improvement of their Knowledge in Spiritual Matters, since they were entred into a State of Christianity. *For ye were sometime darknefs, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as Children of the Light, Ver. 8.*

While ye lived in the dark State of *Paganism*, ye did not so clearly know, that Fornication, and Uncleanness, and Covetousness, even to an

Idolatrous Dependence upon Riches, were Sins so odious to God ; But now your Minds are enlightned with the Fruits of the Gospel which our Lord Jesus has published unto you, and you have a full Knowledge of the Differences between Good and Evil, and so of what will please God, and what offend him ; walk as Children of Light, let the Course of your Lives be agreeable to the Mind of God ; that it may be apparent, that the Heavenly Doctrines revealed unto you by us the Ministers of Christ, have not only given Light unto your Understandings, but also have their just Weight upon your Heart and Affections, your Mind and Manners.

And to the end they should commit no Mistake about the Works they were engaged to practise as they were sincere Converts to the Religion of Jesus Christ, he acquaints them with the Fruits the Holy Spirit, which dwelt in them, would bring forth. *For the Fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth,* Ver. 9.

The Holy Spirit which Christ after his Ascension did send to his Church, if they did obey the Motions of it, would dispose their Minds to universal Goodness, and such a Benignity and Sweetness of Temper, as to render every Body, where they had Power and Opportunity, the better by them ; it would make them exactly just in all their Dealings ; regardful of the Truth in all they said, and most faithful to their Promises.

Proving

Proving what is acceptable to the Lord,
 Ver. 10. Honestly bringing all Works to a trial
 by the Rules laid down in the Christian Reli-
 gion, before they ventured upon them; that they
 might not be deceived with the Appearances
 only of Piety, and, taking up the Forms of God-
 liness, have none of the Power of it to Act and
 Influence their Souls: But having, by a careful
 Examination, discovered what is counterfeit from
 what is real and solid Vertue, they will only do
 those things which will please and be acceptable
 to Christ, unto whom they have given up their
 Name, and whom they have chosen for their
 Master, and expect that hereafter he will appear
 in great Glory and Power to be their Judge.

And in order to assist them in the Trials they
 would make, and the Judgments they should
 pass upon Things; he gives them a special Cau-
 tion in the Words of the Text: *And have no
 fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darknes,*
but rather reprove them.

In handling of which Subject I shall take the
 following Method.

(1.) Enquire why Sins are called Works of
 Darknes.

(2.) I will shew what it is to have Fellow-
 ship with them.

(3.) I will prove them to be Unfruitful.

I am in the *first* Place to enquire in what re-
 spects Sins are called Works of Darknes; which
 may be in these several Respects.

(1.) Because Sin is most opposite to the Nature of God, who is Light.

(2.) Because the Devil, who has the Name of the Prince of Darkness, does tempt Men, and draw them into the Practice of Sin.

(3.) Because Wicked Actions do darken the Understanding, and weaken and dull all the Powers of the Mind.

(4.) Because Men hardned in a Course of ungodly living, do hate the Light and all those who would instruct and Reform them.

(5.) Because they chuse to act their Sins in dark Corners, and secret Places.

(6.) Because their Wicked Deeds do end in Death, and outer Darkness.

(1.) Sins may be called the Works of Darkness, because they are most opposite to the Nature of God. *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all, 1 John 1. 5.* Light sometimes passes in the Scripture for Understanding or Knowledge. And then by the Metaphor of Light, is represented God's Omniscience, whereby every kind of Beings, with their Qualities, Differences, and Properties, and Relations; all Things, Thoughts, Words, and Actions, that have been, that are, or shall be; are known unto him.

All the Contrivances that are working about in Mens Heads, or the Plots and Designs which are closely lodged in their Hearts; all their secret Practices in their Innermost Retirements, what-

ever

ever they do in the Darknes of the Night ; lye all in the full view of God, as much as if they had been acted on the Stage by the Light of the Sun.

For the Darknes and the Light are to him alike, with respect of his Power to discover the Things that are done in both. *The word of God — is a discernor of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart.* Neither is there any Creature that is not manifest in his Sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do, Heb. 4. 12, 13. In this Sense we find the Word *Light* taken by the Prophet Daniel, *He revealeth the deep and secret things : he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him,* Dan. 2. 22. That is, infinite Knowledge dwelleth in him, is so essential to his most perfect Nature ; that it does perceive and observe whatever is transacted in Heaven above, or Earth beneath, or in the Depths of the Sea, or lyeth secret in the Mind, or is done in places most remote from the Light of the Sun.

At other Times, by *Light* in the Scriptures we are to understand Simplicity, in Opposition to all Composition or Mixture : Or Purity, in Opposition to all Filthiness and Corruption. God's Nature being exactly the same, without the least Variety, Mixture, or Difference ; entire without any Allay, free from all defects, not abased by the least Defilement or Impurity.

Thus God is said to be *Light*, and in him there is no Darknes at all, *i. e.* nothing that degenerates from the Beauty and Purity of
Light :

Light: and to be of purer Eyes than to behold Evil; and that he cannot look on Iniquity. Such is the Purity of his most Blessed Nature, that he cannot behold the Wickedness of Men with the least Approbation or Allowance.

And as the Light does scatter it self over the World, so the Heaven and the Earth are filled with the Glory of God's Majesty. He dwelleth in the Light which *no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see, i. e.* he possesseth Infinite and Eternal Glory, of which none of the Creatures are capable.

God and Christ are also said to be Light, with regard to the great Manifestation that has been made of the Divine Nature and Will by the preaching of the Gospel, and to the large Discovery which thereby was made of Heaven and Hell, and to the Way and Means for Men to forsake and subdue their Sins, and for those who had conquered their Evil Lusts to become Partakers of a Joyful and Happy Immortality. In this Sense, Christ is called the true light, which *lighteth every man that cometh into the World*, John 1. 9. *And to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of God's people Israel.* And Christ speaks of himself, *As long as I am in the World, I am the light of the World*, John 9. 5. *Then spake Jesus unto them, saying, I am the light of the World: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of Life*, John 8. 12.

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It is worthy of our Notice, that in the whole Scripture there is hardly any description of the Essence and Nature of God, but something is contained in it which may make for our Good. In the Characters God gives of himself, still something does occur, which should either excite our Admiration, or move our Love, or quicken our Care, or waken our Fear.

With respect to the Gospel, which was the last Will he by his own Son would publish to Mankind, we find God and Jesus Christ, called *Light*. Because this Holy Gospel does so fully reveal what God is, and what are the inseparable Attributes of his Glorious Essence; what he loves, and what he wills; (that he is most Holy and pure; that he loves and wills Purity and Holiness;) and what Worship and Service, and what Servants and Worshippers he does approve, love, and require.

In the Gospel it is made as clear as the Light, that the Worship of God must be pure and spiritual; and that they who will be accepted of him, must worship him in Humility, Meekness, and Holiness, in Spirit and Truth.

Now forasmuch as all Iniquity is odious in the Eyes of God, and he hates and abhors Uncleannefs; and nothing is so contrary to the Purity which the Gospel has demonstrated to be essential to him, as Sin and Wickedness; therefore all evil Deeds are very properly called *the Works of Darknefs*.

(2.) Sin

(2.) Sin, may be stiled Darknes, because the Devil, who is the Prince of Darknes, does chiefly tempt and draw Men into the Practice of Sin. Satan, who fell like Lightning from Heaven, being now confined to Chains in Darknes, is daily laying Plots to betray us; he is ever tempting us with Baits to yield up our Innocence; and the more effectually to over-reach us with his cunning Devices, he transforms himself into an Angel of Light.

He is the Leader and the General of all the Forces of the Kingdom of Darknes, who make Opposition to the Powers of Heaven, the Light and Truth of God: In his black Den all the wicked Projects are forged, whereby he first draws off Men from the Thoughts of God, and then encourages them in their ignorance of his Nature and Will; and so they are seduced into a false Security of the Safety of their own Condition, until Death does remove the Curtain, and shew how miserably they have been deceiv'd. Wherefore since Satan was banish'd from the Regions of Light, and his Habitation is in the thickest Darknes; and since the Malice of all his Designs is bent against the Children of Light; the Conquests he makes, and the Sins he betrays Men into, may truly be said to be Works of Darknes.

(3.) Because wicked Actions do darken the Understanding, and dull and weaken all the Powers of the Mind. There is not any thing
does

does so bind up the Imagination of a Man, and cramp his Invention ; there is nothing does so blot out of his Memory all the curious or wise Observations he had treasur'd up ; there is nothing does so confound his Judgment, and disable him from distinguishing true from false, and good from Evil ; in a word, there is nothing does so enfeeble every Faculty of his Soul, as Intemperance and Debauchery.

A lewd and wicked Life will unman us and rob us of our Reason : It is the Cause, why Men put higher value on the Possession of a little Money or Land to be enjoy'd but a small Term of Years, than they do upon an inestimable Treasure in Heaven, which the largest Length of Time cannot damage nor decay, nor the greatest Power among the Creatures force from them.

Sin so corrupts their Understandings, and emasculates their Spirits, that they are more afraid of the Displeasure of a mortal Man like themselves, than the Anger of an Almighty God, which consumes more fiercely and effectually than the hottest Fire.

It so debases their Apprehensions of things, that they can worship the vilest Creature that creeps or grows upon the Ground, in the place of the great and glorious Maker of Heaven and Earth.

It so disorders them, that they make the worst use that can be of the little Remains they have of Understanding ; they make themselves pleasant with their Sins, which prey upon their Vitals, and, like a Millstone about their Necks, will sink

sink them into the bottom of Hell ; they can find no difference between innocent Wit and open Prophaneness ; they esteem themselves upon their scandalous and professed Wickedness ; they have no other way of sending down their Names to Posterity, but by the impudence of their Blasphemy ; they spend the sharpest of their Wit and Parts in mocking at that God, from whom every moment they receive their Life and their Breath ; and if he will turn those into the Pit of Destruction who forget him, what will he do to them who provoke and defy him ?

Again, Wickedness does so shorten Mens foresight of things certainly to come, that they can discern but a little farther before them, than the Horse or the Mule which have no Understanding ; and shall be much more concern'd, how they may spend a few days merrily, than how they shall subsist happily in a Life that shall have no end. Wickedness transports them into such degrees of Madness, that they shall expose to extreme hazard, and often sling away their precious Lives, for a trifling Word, which would scarce offend a wise Man ; when yet upon the good or ill management of these frail Lives, which so vainly they expose to Destruction, does depend an Eternity of infinite Felicity or Torment.

Thus it is an evident thing, that Wickedness does craze the Senses, and baffle the Reason, and overthrow all the judging Powers of the Soul ; causing Men to do the most absurd and unreasonable Actions, and to hope for things which are impossible

impossible to come to pass. How great an Infatuation is brought upon those who act against the Dictates of their Conscience, and the Light of God's Truth, we learn from St. Paul: *Because that when they knew God, they glorify'd him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations; and their foolish heart (i. e. Understanding) was darkned; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, Rom. 1. 21, 22. And again, Eph. 4. 18, 19. Having the understanding darkned, being alienated from the life of God, thro' the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves unto lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

(4.) The Deeds of Wickedness may be called Works of Darknes, because Men hardened in a course of ungodly living, do hate the Light, and all those who would instruct and reform them. They are unwilling yet to leave their Sins, and it is very grievous to them to hear the Danger of them discover'd. They are most loth to forsake the Evil of their ways; and therefore, to make them more sensible of their Folly and Disingenuity, does cut them to the quick; and their Heart rises against whosoever undertakes so ungrateful an Office.

They will elude the Force of his most serious Arguments with Railery; they will ridicule what they cannot answer; they will tax the Sincerity of his Undertaking, and blast the
Repu.

Reputation of him who gives them so much trouble.

Therefore they forsake the House of God, lest their Consciences should meet with Convictions of the great hazard they run of damning their poor Souls; they shun all virtuous Conversation, they dread the opening their Bibles or any serious Book, for fear they should casually light on such Passages as would disturb the soft repose they have in a sensual Life.

Thus the *Jews* went about to take away the Life of Christ, because he laid open their Hypocrisy, and inform'd them wherein the right Worship of God did consist. *But now you seek to kill me, a Man that hath told you the Truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham,* John 8. 40. When *Job* had given a pretty large Account of the various Ways of the Wicked, he at length affirms of them, *They are of those that rebel against the light, they not know the ways thereof, nor abide in the Paths thereof.* Job 24. 13.

A Man of a wicked Life, would be glad to bring himself to disbelieve the Truths of Religion, which lay open to him the infinite Danger of his Immortal Soul; which discover the heavy Wrath of God against his Sins; which assure him he is in a very bad condition; which convince him he acts against his Reason and his true Interest; that he is a vile contemptible Creature, which must be lost for ever, unless he leave off his Evil Courses, and return to God and his Duty, with Fasting, and Weeping, and Prayer.

When

When a bad Man reflects upon his horrid Ingratitude towards God, how willing would he be to blot the Idea of him out of his Mind; and rather to wiſh there was no God, than that he ſhould be drawn before him by the Angels, to receive a dreadful Sentence at the Bar of Juſtice for all the Lewdneſs, and Blaſphemies, and Perjuries, and Acts of Uncleanneſs, which he hath committed in the Fleſh!

Our Lord tells us, *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be reprov'd,* John 3, 20. He muſt hate that Light which diſcovers ſuch unpleaſing News; which clearly demonſtrates that the Courſe of his Life is contrary to Reaſon, to his own Happineſs, to the Will of God; that his Caſe is deſperate; that his Actions render him odious to his Judge; that there is no eſcaping of utter Ruin, unleſs he leave the Way he is in.

Hence it is that the Carnal Mind is Enmity againſt God; *For it is not ſubject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be,* Rom. 8. 7. A Man abandoned to the Luſts of the Fleſh, or given up to the Love of Riches, cannot hear, but with great Impatience and Diſorder, of the Laws of God, which require Purity in our Hearts and Lives, and great Love and Charity towards all our Brethren in Wants. Wherefore the Carnal Man is careful to ſhut up all the Paſſages in his Soul, thro' which theſe uneaſy, ſad, and troubleſome Truths may break in upon him.

Q

Thus

Thus the Wicked close their Eyes against the Truth which does offend them, and they chuse to walk in Darknes. *But foolish Men shall not attain unto her, and sinners shall not see her ; for she is far from Pride ; and Men that are Liars, cannot remember her.* Eccl. 15. 7, 8.

(5.) Sin may have the Name of Darknes, because Men make Choice of Dark Corners and Secret Places to act their Wickedness in. How much kindness soever they may have for their filthy Lusts, yet they will not comply with them in the publick Streets, or the openness of the Markets or Stage ; but rather seek the most retired Places and close Holes, to dishonour God, and debase their own Nature. Thus the Apostle in the Verse after the Text ; *For it is a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

For there is an Abhorrence in Humane Nature to Sin, which makes the wicked Person ashamed of his Crime, afraid of being found out ; and to perpetrate his vile Iniquities, as far as ever he can from the Light and the Eyes of Men. *They that be drunken, are drunken in the Night,* 1 Thes. 5. 7.

No Nation was ever yet so Brutish as to value it self upon the Wickedness of its Inhabitants ; or that desired to be notorious to Posterity, for its scandalous and unnatural Lusts ; or that looked upon its Vices to be a firm Foundation to establish its Posterity upon.

No

No, the generality of Men are so much under the Authority of Conscience, as rather by Apologies to extenuate their Sins, than to justify them; rather to cover their Villanies with Silence and the Night, than to approve and recommend them as Examples for the Imitation of the Generations to come.

No Man therefore can be very bad on a sudden, or extremely wicked at the beginning: For Nature and Conscience are both against him, and he must have done much Violence to them before he can place himself in the Chair of the Scornor. He enters first upon Sin, with Remorse in his Conscience, with Confusion in his Mind, with Fear in his Heart, with Trembling in his Limbs, and with Shame in his Face. And after the Sin is committed, he is much cast down, and feels horrid Pangs and Gripes from the Reflections he makes thereupon. So that the Sin must be often repeated, and he must have many a Struggle with his Reason, and Battel with his Conscience, before he can grow a little easy in a wicked Life; but Reason must be quite dethroned, and Conscience stupified and seared as it were with a Hot Iron, before he does bad Actions without Pain or Regret, and does brag and glory in his Iniquity.

(6.) Sins may be called Darkness, because they end in Death and Darkness. All the Splendor and Gaiety of the Wicked, will have a Melancholy and Obscure Conclusion; their Sun will set in a Cloud; their Glory will be for ever eclipsed;

eclipsed; for the candle of the wicked shall be put out, Prov. 24. 20. Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine, Job 18. 5.

How noble a Figure soever they make in the World; how much soever they are feared, courted, or admired; yet all their Pomp, and Greatness, and Glory, will be swallowed up in an Eternal Night. For to them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, Jude 13. May we all therefore before this the day of our trial is quite spent, cast off the works of darkness, and put on the Armor of Light; walking honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy: But put on the Lord Jesus Christ (by an Innocent, Chaste, Holy, and Pure Life,) and make no provision (any longer) for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. 13. 12, 13, 14.

(2.) I am to shew what it is to have Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness. (Men may be said to have Fellowship either with the Workers of Darkness; or the Works of Darkness themselves.) Men may be said to have Fellowship, when they are Members of a Society, have obliged themselves to live by its Rules, to submit to its Orders, and to be obedient to its governing Powers, and to support and defend it against all Opposition.

Thus Sinners are under the Authority of the Prince of Darkness; they comply with the Suggestions of his Malicious Will; they submit to his

his Temptations, without disputing his Right to govern them, without resisting his Pleasure, tho' he puts them upon Things that are very unreasonable; tho' they cannot yield Obedience to him, without great Danger of destroying their Health, blasting their Credit, wasting their Estate, ruining both their Soul and Body, and bringing great Mischief to others. Satan is the General who leads and commands them, and they are in a League and Confederacy under him, to oppose and disturb the Children of Light.

Again, Men may be said to have Fellowship with the Workers of Darknes, when they voluntarily join with them in any wicked Design, help them to do any ill Work, to discourage Piety, to support Ungodliness, or to execute any cruel Project.

Such a *Fellowship of Workers of Darknes* were the Bloody Jews, who had bound themselves under a great Curse, that they would neither eat nor drink before they had murder'd St. Paul.

To have Fellowship therefore with the Works of Darknes, is to act them, to partake of them, to help in carrying them forward; or to be pleased with them, tho' we do not concur and give our assisting Hand to bring them forth.

First, From hence it follows plainly in the first Place, that They have Fellowship with the Works of Darknes, who do not love God, nor believe the Affairs of the World to be order'd by his Providence; who have suspicious Thoughts

about the Truths of Religion; who think their Happiness depends most upon the Discretion of their own Management, and being therefore little sensible of the Benefit of God's Help in the Conduct of their Lives, they neither desire nor pray for it.

Thus being in the World without Fear of the Deity, without any Reverence or Esteem for Virtue, they do not only commit Sin, but they justify it: They do not only neglect Religious Duties, but despise them, and have all devout Persons in the greatest Contempt.

These are Men that run to Excess of Riot, that commit Uncleaness with Greediness, being covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, 2 Tim. 3. 2, 3. Tho' Christ is come in the Flesh, yet they are without him; being strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, Eph. 3. 12.

Secondly, They without all question have fellowship with the Works of Darknes, who, tho' the Contempts they put upon God and Religion, are not so publick as those of the Men I now have named; yet their Affections are as much estranged from the Service of God, and their Hearts are as full of Wickedness.

In

In secret they are exceeding vicious, and they boggle not at the commission of the vilest Sin which may promote their Worldly Interest, increase their Profit, or gratify their Lust. They do not openly speak against Religion, not from any true Love they have for it, but because the Character of Atheists may do them a deal of hurt in the Affairs of this Life. And we may observe, that they who do not love God, from whom they have receiv'd all that they have; can never truly love Men, how much soever they have obliged them. For it plainly appears, that they are without any Principles of Virtue, and Justice, and Gratitude; and do measure every thing by their own private Advantage, and care for their best Friends no longer than they can serve them; and therefore no Body that is wise, will trust them with their Lives or Estates, or depend upon their Kindness.

Now to avoid these Inconveniencies which open Prophaneness would draw upon them among Men, they make an outward show of being Religious, notwithstanding Religion has not the least influence upon their Hearts; they also sometimes speak well of good Men, tho' they secretly despise them.

So that on the publick Stage they act a Part of Religion, the more effectually to carry on their Secular Designs; but their Thoughts are not at all seriously engaged, either in securing to themselves the Rewards of Heaven, or the escaping the Torments of Hell.

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate, Tit. i. 16. They profess they know there is a God; but their Actions and Course of Life are so contrary to the Nature and Will of this God, that you might think they did herd among those Brutes who deny his Existence: They being Disobedient unto him, averse unto the good Works that please him, and odious and abominable to his pure Eyes, and unto all the sincere Lovers of him: *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, 2 Tim. 3. 5.*

Thirdly, They must also be concluded to have *Fellowship with the Works of Darknes*, who notwithstanding they are not profess'd Atheists, that make a mock at Sin, and think there is nothing in Religion deserving their Thoughts and Care; and tho' in private they do not give up themselves to all the Motions and Suggestions of their unruly Lusts without check and regret; yet for all that, they are so much under the Power of Sin, and in love with the Pleasures of the Flesh, that there is hardly any violent Temptation but it gets the mastery of them, perhaps not without some struggling and trouble. Most Sins, to which, by the Temper of their Body, the Condition of their Life, or old Custom, they have been addicted to; when they are strongly tempted, and there is a fair opportunity, do usually conquer their Resolutions, and lead them away Captive,

It is confessed, that in the general they have a good Opinion of Religion, and a real Esteem for a virtuous Life, and wish they were able to mortify their Lusts, to subdue their unreasonable Appetites, and to govern themselves by the Laws of God : But these wishes of theirs are so faint, that they make little or no alteration in their Minds for the better ; nay, even while they are wishing, they despair of their Wishes having any great effect upon them.

So it comes to pass, that notwithstanding they suffer a constant trouble within themselves for their Sins, yet they still act them as there is occasion and opportunity. The Aversions in their Souls to Wickedness, are strong enough to make their Lives often melancholy and uncomfortable, but not to reduce and subdue their evil Affections.

They do not pray so earnestly and so constantly against their Lusts as they ought to do ; for if they did, God would hear and help them. They do not watch so concernedly against them as the terribleness of the Danger does require ; if they did they would not be so often surprized. They do not resolve so stoutly and courageously to resist them, as if the Salvation of their Souls lay at the Stake ; for if they did, their Resolutions would not be so easily baffled.

They do not so deeply affect their Minds with Reflections upon the odious Nature of Sin, and the utter Abhorrence God has of it ; for were they not wanting herein, it is impossible that Sin, which they know to be so shameful in its
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Consequences, and so destructive in the End, should thus frequently baffle them with the flatteries of its deceitful Countenance.

Fourthly, He hath *Fellowship with the Works of Darkness*, who accustoms himself to any single Sin; who coolly and deliberately does any one evil thing: For his love of the Sin, is stronger than his fear of offending God; he prefers the Pleasure of that wicked Act above the Divine Favour, and the Contentment which does arise from entire Obedience to God's Law. He chuses rather to hazard the Happiness of Heaven, than to deny himself the slender delight he finds in his beloved Sin.

And when a Man shall have less regard to the Favour and Authority of God, than to a short and brutish Enjoyment, he justly may be said to have *fellowship with the Works of Darkness*.

Moreover, it cannot be conceiv'd, that he who out of a free Principle of Love and Reverence serves God, should allow himself in the habitual Practice of any Wickedness. For if a Man sincerely loves God, it must go against his very Soul wilfully and deliberately to offend him.

Whom we unfeignedly love, those we must study to please and delight; and how therefore can we venture upon any thing that is grievous to them, without losing our quiet, and raising a frightful Commotion in our Breasts? So if the Love of God does continue firm within us, tho' of sudden chance we may fall into Sin, yet we

we shall never endure to accustom our selves in it.

But if we continue in the doing of a Sin till it grows into a Custom, it will alienate our Hearts from God; and the Fear, and Honour, and Esteem of him, will insensibly decay till it be quite extinguish'd in our Hearts.

Wherefore the Case of the Man must be deplorable, who suffers himself to be enslaved to a single Sin, which will sink his very Nature into so low and wretched a condition, that the love of God will no longer abide in it, and so he will be unfit to be a member of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Besides, no Man can long tarry in a State of habituating himself unto one Sin only: Since that evil Habit will so weaken the Spiritual Powers in him, that it will be extremely probable after such a Blow given to the Love of God and the Sense of Virtue, that he will yield to any other Sins upon a vehement Temptation, and at last degenerate into a very bad Man. So while the Root of any one Sin remains alive in the Soul, it will, according to its Nature, be spreading it self continually, and getting of more ground, until it has over-run the whole Soil.

(3.) That the *Works of Darknes* are *unfruitful*. By Fruit we are to understand the Good or Advantage which does come to Men from their Actions: And That is good, which preserves or increases the Perfections of our Nature, and does

does make some real addition to the Happiness of our Condition.

But nothing does so much advance the Happiness of Man, as what produces Peace and Quiet in his Mind. Now *Works of Darkness* make no ones Mind more easy, how much pains soever he takes in them, and how long soever he follows them.

They do not compose his Spirit, or allay his Passions; such Fruits of Sin indeed would be desirable: But Sin raises a fierce War between the Members and the Mind; and the wicked Man is almost pulled in pieces by the Oppositions and Strugglings between the Flesh and Spirit. For when the lower Appetites push a Man forward to commit a deed of Darkness; his Reason, especially when it's enlightned by Divine Revelation, does oppose that brutish Motion.

Hence rises a great Disorder within Him, who thus ventures to treat with any Sin in hopes to receive Pleasure from the doing of it. His Reason suggests, he cannot do this Evil without disobliging a good God, who has been infinitely kind to him; and without offending a powerful Master, whose Wrath will consume Sinners.

However, the poor Offender having yielded to treat with his filthy Lust, it urges him still more and more to comply with it: But Conscience flies in his Face, checks these wicked Inclinations, and makes him sensible, that if he yields he shall be undone.

And

And if the first Approaches to a wicked Action do thus fill wretched Men with Confusion, and almost tear their Souls asunder; how desperate a Case do they fall into, who at length give way to fleshly Motions?

Who, after they are convinced that their Reputation will be blasted, their Health impaired, their Wit decay'd, their Estates lessened, their Conscience wounded, and God provoked; yet venture upon the Sins that draw all these evil Consequences after them?

Thus we see with what little Peace or Comfort, Men set upon their Sins. But may not the Pleasure in the Enjoyment satisfy them to such a degree, as to recompence all the difficulties and troubles they broke through before they durst submit to their vile Iniquities?

The contrary to this will appear most true from the general Confession of Sinners, that the unlawful Pleasure did fall abundantly below their expectation; and that the continuance of that little Pleasure, was very short: That the sinful Enjoyment but of the Day or Night before, had left no more Impression behind them in their Minds, than can be discover'd of the way of a Ship in the Sea, or of the Passage of a Bird in the Air.

The Pleasure was quite gone off, and all the Sense they had of it; But That was not all which had happened unto them upon the Commission of their Sin; for notwithstanding it had left no true Delight behind it, yet a Damp upon the Conscience and Spirits was remaining. His Drunkenness

ness had disorder'd his Head and Stomach, and unfitted him for his Duty and Business ; the Fury of his Anger had flung him off the hooks, and he was ashamed of what he had said and done ; his Lust had humbled him to the mean Condition of brute Beasts, and he feared such an impure Wretch should never be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven ; or in the hurry of his Revenge, having laid his Hands on his harmless Brother, and shed innocent Blood, he sleeping and waking could dream or think of nothing but Juries and Judges, and Executioners, and Axes, and Gibbets : And that having such a Stain or Mark set upon him, like that of *Cain*, he should for ever be banish'd from the Presence of God.

These are the Natural and the only Fruits Men gather from the *Works of Darkness* ; for a Man must contradict his Understanding, force his Conscience, baffle his most serious and well-weighed Resolutions, and raise a Civil War in his Soul, before he can bring himself to do Evil. And when the Evil is over, the Pleasure does not answer the false Promises of the Tempter ; nor leave the least true Satisfaction behind it, either in the Mind, (which on the contrary is set upon the Rack with melancholy Reflections upon the Folly it has committed) or in the Body, the Vigor of whose Constitution suffers by most Sins ; and it grows less apt to minister unto and serve the Soul, thro' that lowness, sinking and disorder of the Animal Spirits, which is usually caused by the Gratification of our rebellious and unruly Lusts.

So

So that if ever a Man comes ſo much to himſelf, as to conſider how ſhort and unſatisfactory the Delights of Sin are; and how great, and laſting, and numerous the Miſchiefs are which it does produce; he muſt be extremely aſhamed and confounded at the remembrance of what he has done. *What fruit had you then in thoſe things whereof you are now aſhamed? for the end of thoſe things is death,* Rom. 6. 21.

Sin therefore is fruitleſs in the Act, ſhameful in the Reflections made upon it, and deadly in the end. *He that ſoweth in the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption,* Gal. 6. 8. He that maketh it his Study to pamper the Luſts of his lower Appetite; in recompence of all his Toil, ſhall not only reap ſhort, tranſitory, corruptible Delights, but alſo ſhall bring, as the natural effect of his Sin, Corruption, Death and Deſtruction upon his Fleſh and Spirit.

I will now make two or three Obſervations upon this Diſcourſe.

(1.) I obſerve that it was an Act of Infinite Goodneſs and Compaſſion in God, to ſend his own Son to Redeem us from the ſad and woful Bondage of our Sins. It was not from a little Inconveniency, or a ſlight Trouble that God freed us; nor at a cheap Rate, nor upon a ſmall Conſideration. But he delivered us from the greateſt and moſt durable of Miſeries; from Miſeries we never could have got looſe from, or maſter'd by our own Knowledge or Abilities, or by the Aſſiſtance of our wiſeſt and moſt powerful Friends.

And

And this Deliverance was effected for us by no lower a Price than that of the Life of his most dearly beloved Son, who never had disobeyed or offended him.

Had not all Iniquity been most hateful unto the pure Eyes of God, and had not we by our Iniquity reduced our selves into a most distressed and helpless Condition, God never would have sent the Son of his own Bosom to undergo a Death so full of Pain and Disgrace, that Publick Satisfaction might be made to his Justice for our Transgressions; that all the World might know the irreconcilable Abhorrence he had to Wickedness, and that we might again be restored to his Grace and Favour.

Most unreasonable therefore it is for us to have Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness, which have an inseperable and odious Repugnancy to the Purity of the Divine Nature; which were the Cause of the Effusion of the Blood and Life of the Son of God; and which debase the Dignity of Humane Condition, fill Men with Shame and Horror, and conclude in utter Ruin of Soul and Body.

And most fit it is, we should Thank the Lord with all our Heart and all our Might, and magnify the Riches of his Goodness, who had Pity on us when we lay weltring in our Blood without Remedy or Friend; and contrived the Way for us to get from under the Tyrannical Power of Sin, and to cleanse our Souls from the Guilt and Corruption thereof.

2. Since

(2.) Since the Fruit Sin brings forth, is so Sour, harsh and hurtful, in the Conclusion; we ought not to complain of the Judgments and Afflictions God lays upon us to recover us from our Iniquities. Altho' the Cup we are to Drink be very Bitter, yet if it carry off those filthy Lusts which would have excluded our Souls out of the Kingdom of Heaven, is there any Cause why we should tax God with undue Severity?

If any Calamity or Disease does press hard, or rest a long Time upon us, we ought not to grow Angry and Impatient, provided it has the good Effect to bring our Proud Hearts to know themselves, and to humble them into a full Dependence upon God's Mercy.

Let the worst come upon us that Malice can devise, or Cruelty put in Execution, yet we ought to be so far from quarreling with God for the reasonable Corrections that he sends to mend us, or for the Afflictions he permits to try our Sincerity; that it is our Duty to be thankful for the good that is designed us by these severer Dispensations of Providence, and to rejoice at the glorious Rewards that God has laid up for suffering Virtue. Thus the Blessed Apostle: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us, Rom. 8. 18. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am perswaded, that neither death,*

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nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, Ver. 35, 38, 39.

(3.) From the deadly Nature of Sin, we may gather how dismal the Condition is of them whom God gives up to themselves; and having withdrawn the Grace, which, with the highest Contempt, they have abused and trodden under their Feet; suffers them to rush into all manner of Wickedness, and to commit it greedily.

This is the most terrible of Punishments, because God never inflicts it but upon the worst of Sinners, whose Hearts are extremely hardened; and when his Mercy is most despised, and his Justice in the highest Degrees affronted and provoked.

When Mercies cease to melt and soften the Heart, and when Judgments do neither frighten nor reclaim the Sinner; then is the Black Time come, that God punishes one Sin with another. *Because I have purged thee, and thou wouldst not be purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, Ezekiel 24. 13.*

When Men arrive at such a Pitch of Obstinacy in a course of Wickedness, as to blaspheme the Holy Name that purchased them Salvation, and to deny the Lord that bought them; then the dreadful Decree is pronounced, *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.*

Thus

Thus the Wicked Man who despising the riches of the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God, proceeds securely in his abominable Impieties, does after his hardness and impenitent Heart, treasure up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous Judgment of God; Rom. 2. 4, 5.

That therefore the Lord in his sore Displeasure may not give us up unto our selves, may we carefully attend all the actings of his Holy Spirit in our Minds, and yield Obedience to its gentle Motions.

May every Mercy we receive, make us Thank-ful; may every Judgment humble and re-form our Wills and Manners. May we never shut our Ears against God's Voice, or neglect and despise the Means of Grace. From all Blindness and Hardness of Heart; from Contempt of thy Word and Commandment, Good Lord deliver us.



SERMON XI.

PSALM XVI. 8.

I have set the Lord always before me.

IT was manifest to Holy *David*, and could not escape any one's Observation, that there is no being completely Happy in this World; but that every State and Condition hath a Mixture of Good and Evil, notwithstanding it be the general and chief design of Men to possess themselves of the good Things which will make Life comfortable, and to avoid the Evils which render it troublesome and uneasy:

That the want of Success in their Endeavours after the Delights of Life, did breed discontent and uneasiness in their Minds, and made them Jealous and Envious, and apt to contend with and hurt one another:

And

And that the great Reason why Men frequently did not succeed in their Pursuits of Happiness, was their not rightly judging of the Nature and Causes of it, nor their using the true and proper means to attain it.

For Men, the greater Number of them, seem to place their Happiness in Things which are not in their own Power; which either they cannot obtain, or, being obtained, cannot keep; and which, while they have them, do yield but little of that Satisfaction they imagined to find in them.

For Dominion, and Riches, and Fame, in the procuring of which, Men often sink their Health, and break their Constitution, violate their Faith, and betray their Trusts, and wound their Reputation; are no essential Ingredients of our Happiness, nor real Excellencies and Virtues of our Nature: Since a bad Man may have a large share of them, with a Heart distracted with Cares and Fears; and a good Man in the wise and honest Management of a small Income, may rest fully contented.

If then it be plain, that true Felicity is not to be found in the good Things without us, because Men have been miserable who did partake of the greatest Portions of them, which in stead of proving to them the Instruments of Comfort, became the Occasions of their Ruin; we must, when we be enquiring after that real Good which will satisfy us, carry our Eyes beyond the mass of Creatures that do surround us,

and look up to the Creator of our Beings, with entire Assurance, that he only can fill our Souls with solid Peace and lasting Joys, who was the Author of them. *For when he openeth his hand, he satisfies the desire of every living thing,* Psalm 145. 26.

Having therefore, with the Royal Psalmist, observed how numerous their Troubles and Dangers be, who live without regard of their Maker; and that their Sorrows shall be multiplied, who hasten after other Gods, who worship Images, or make Idols of their Riches, or sacrifice their Strength to their Lusts:

Let Us also with him, with humble Respect, Duty, and Affection, say unto the Lord, *Thou art our Lord:* And tho' *our goodness extendeth not to him, i. e.* tho' our Merit and Virtues neither do deserve, nor can requite his loving kindness; yet he will give us Counsel in Difficulties, and save us in Distress by his right Hand.

Let us sincerely put our Trust in him, and he will preserve us. He will be the Portion of our Inheritance, and Maintain our Lot. We then certainly shall have gladness in our Hearts, and rejoice under the various Dispensations of Divine Providence, and have our Flesh and Soul also rest in hope of a glorious Resurrection, *if we will set the Lord always before us.*

Now in Order to have our Souls wait on God only, and in all our Ways to acknowledge him, we ought to endeavour,

(1.) To

(1.) To have a firm Belief of his Being and Existence.

(2.) To have right Notions of his Nature and Attributes.

(3.) To have a just Sense of our Duty and Obligations to God, arising from our Relation to him, and dependence upon his Bounty for all that we have, or can hope for hereafter.

(1.) In order to have our Souls wait continually, and only upon God, and to fix our whole Expectations upon him, and to *set him always before us*; it is necessary we should have a firm Belief of his Existence.

Altho' it be an Heinous Presumption to call into Question the Being of God, of whose existence we may be most certain from invincible Reasons; yet the more frequently and attentively we consider the Proofs of a Deity, the fuller and clearer the Evidence of them will be to us.

For notwithstanding God has furnished us with Plenty of Ways to find out, and of Arguments to discover our Relation to him; yet without considering and reflecting seriously on them, our Belief of him may continue very Feeble and Infirm. It being certain, that Truths capable of Demonstration will have no Force on a Man, who will not apply his Thoughts to apprehend them, and to understand how one Thing follows from another.

It is therefore our Duty and Interest, often to employ our Time in Meditations, on the many

and great Reasons which Convince us that God is: Which is the Foundation of Religion and Morality. Now the Existence of our selves, and of every Thing about us, do bring us to the knowledge of an Eternal Being.

For our existence makes it necessary that something should be Eternal; because mere Nothing, or Non-entity could not be the cause of any Thing. And so it is most manifest, the first Cause of Things must be Eternal.

But we perceive no Signs of Eternity Imprest on the World. What is Eternal, must be Unchangeable, and without Variation: But we find nothing in the World which is not Obnoxious to Change, and which does not in some Measure suffer an Alteration; The tallest Mountains, and the hardest Rocks are perpetually mouldring and wearing away by Winds and Storms, and Rains; and therefore it is impossible they should have been Eternally in this State, or that they could be Eternal in a Succession of changeable States; for Eternal and Unchangeable, are reciprocal, and mutually imply and suppose each other. And if their Eternity be impossible, it is necessary they should have had a Beginning.

And as we behold Marks of Decay in all the Things that are before us, so have we no ground to believe that we our selves do exist and continue by any Power or Strength in our own Nature. We have no Evidence that we did not receive our Being from another, and we have plain Evidence that

that we cannot preserve it without Foreign Assistance and Supplies from Abroad.

Thus all Beings which had a beginning, do necessarily lead us to a Being which had none, and which did give Existence to them all, but was it self from Eternity.

And what is Eternal, is self-existing; for it is a Contradiction, it should receive that of another, which it had always in it self. It is also Omnipotent, because there is nothing to control or oppose it. So that this Eternal Being must be the Seat and Fountain of all Power; and all the Perfections scattered in the World must be found united in him, who did create it; for nothing can give, what it hath not in it self.

If we will but accustom our selves to survey the Works of the Creation; not only from a view of the vast System of Beings, by which we understand the Universe; but from the particular consideration of our selves, or of any other living Creatures, or even of Plants and Vegetables, we may Collect and Deduce infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness.

If we will consider, that the Parts of our Body are so many, that with the greatest Pains we cannot find out their Number; and that there is such a great Variety in their Sizes, Shapes, Figures, and Qualities, that we can never be able to observe them all; that every Part has an Office or Use peculiar to it self, tho' our most diligent Sagacity cannot fully discover it; And if likewise we consider, that all these Parts, tho' so large in Number, so unlike in Qualities, and so different
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in their Employment, do all yet join in, and Conspire to one End, namely, to the Preservation of the whole Body; we cannot be excessive in magnifying the Skill and Power of him that made it. But still our Wonder will rise much higher, when ever we reflect that this artfully contrived Body is united to a Soul most distant from it in Nature, and void of all its Parts and Qualities: Since the manner how a Body and Soul should be joined, or how a thinking Mind should act upon senseless Matter; how the Thoughts of the Soul should influence the Spirits of the Body; and how the Will should make it move, when it did rest; and put a stop to it, when it was in motion; are things beyond our Conceptions, and which cannot be accounted for by any Philosophy.

So that the result of our Meditations must be, with David, to conclude every one for himself; *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it. I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my Soul knoweth right well,* Psal. 139. 6, 14.

And tho' it fully appears, that we need go no farther than *our selves* for clear Proof of the Being of God; yet we shall meet with clear Convictions, and ample Satisfaction, to what Part of the World soever we shall carry our Contemplations.

For should we proceed to consider the Fowls of the Air, the Beasts on the Land, and the Fish
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in the Sea ; and make Observations on the amazing variety of the sorts of each kind of these Creatures ; and of the exceeding great numbers of the Individuals of every sort ; and of the admirable Structure of the Bodies of each single Individual ; we must celebrate the Fruitfulness, Wisdom, and Goodness of Providence, which has given Being to so many and various Creatures ; which has assigned every one of them Places to dwell in suitable to their Natures, and bestows Food on them all in due Season.

We might also fetch firm Arguments for the Divine Existence from the Trees of the Forest, the Green Herbs, and Flowers and Fruits of the Field : Should we take notice of the extraordinary manner in which they grow, and the exquisite Art by which they receive Nourishment from the Earth, and with what just Proportions of Heat and Moisture they are gradually advanced to their Ripeness and Beauty. For *Solomon*, who had carry'd things as far as Human invention could reach, was not, in all his Glory, to be compared with them.

But further : did we lift up our Eyes to the Heavens, and behold the Number, Greatness, and Splendor of the Stars ; did we note the Regularity of their Motions, in which they have continued some thousands of Years, without falling into confusion or any disorder : And did we but reflect upon their prodigious Bigness, and their inconceivable distance from us, and the Immenity of that Space, which things so great and so far from one another, must possess ; we could not but
readily

readily and heartily acknowledge, that they are unanswerable Arguments, and illustrious Demonstrations of the infinite Power and Wisdom of him who did Form, and does guide and Rule over them. We could not but declare, *That the Heavens were the work of his fingers, and that the firmament sheweth the art of his handy work, and that he hath ordained the Moon and Stars.*

But we cannot have a better Proof of the Divine Wisdom than This, that God has so contrived and disposed his Creatures, that they yield Benefit and Advantage to one another. And this mutual Usefulness is not only to be found among Creatures of the same Species or Kind, which could not live without the help of one another; but almost all things, and Men especially, receive good from every thing that does encompass them.

And as the several Parts be necessary for the Conservation of the Body, so the Parts are nourish'd and enabled to discharge their respective Offices and Functions by the Succours ministred from things without them. The Eye, the Heart, and the Hand, are not more necessary for the upholding the Life of Man; than the Air he breatheth, the Water he drinks, and the Food he taketh, are to repair the daily decays of his Nature.

The meaner things are adapted to the Service and Benefit of those in higher Rank; from the Earth, the Plants have a supply; Plants yield nourishment

ishment to brute Creatures; and They become proper Food for Men.

Thus we see a link'd dependence in the methodical Order of things, which could only happen by the contrivance of an infinitely wise Mind, who formed an Idea of such a noble Design, and then by fitting means brought it to pass.

Such Arguments as these, duly attended to, will make us as certain of the Existence of God, as of our selves; and make it appear impossible that the World should be made or supported without a Being of Infinite Perfections.

For when we reflect upon the Stupendous Collection of Things, some as marvellously little, as others wonderfully great; and that they be so orderly disposed, as to contribute to the mutual good of one another; what can we do but Admire, and Love, and Adore, and Reverence the great Director of all. After this manner the Prophet *Jeremiah* elegantly expresses the Sense of his Soul; *He hath made the earth by his power, he hath establish'd the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding, Jer. 51. 15.*

But I cannot dismiss this noble Subject, without considering a specious Objection, which upon Examination will be found to have no force in it.

They pretend, the Order and Exactness we see in the State of things, proceeds from the Laws of Motion Establish'd in the World. Now 'tis true, that the Laws of Motion are well fitted to the several Purposes of Nature; but then the Question

on is, Who did enact these Laws? For is it not very absurd to suppose, there can be Laws without a Law-maker; Rules, and Proportions, and Designs, shewing themselves every where, without a most skilful Artificer to invent, frame and accomplish them?

The Effect will ever prove the Cause; Harmony, and Order, and Usefulness in the Effect, will demonstrate Understanding and Wisdom in the Cause.

But to speak more particularly: it will be evident upon a little Thought and Application, that Motion is not essential to the Nature and being of Matter; because Matter is as truly Matter, having all the Properties and Qualities thereunto belonging, whether it be at rest, or it be in motion; for actual Motion is not implied in the Idea of an extended Substance. But supposing it essential to Matter, it must be inseparable from it; it must be always in all the Parts of Matter, and in the same degree of Velocity and Swiftness in every Part of Matter; the necessary Consequence whereof would be, that all the Matter in the World must be exactly alike; There could be no difference in the Bulk, no diversity or unlikeness in the Qualities, nor even any union or coherence in the Parts of Matter; but the whole would be a fluid uniform Body, consisting of most subtle Parts, render'd invisible and insensible by perpetual Motion, and serviceable to no Purpose, nor answerable to any End whatsoever.

Infomuch

Inſomuch that giving Laws to Motion, and the communicating of it in different Meaſures and Proportions to the ſeveral Parts of Matter; are neceſſary, in the ordinary courſe of Things, to produce that beautiful, harmonious, and beneficial variety we perceive in the World, and do demonſtrate God to be the Author of it.

Hence we may gather, that Mens Degeneracy into Atheiſm, does not proceed from want of undeniable Reaſons to prove God's Exiſtence, but from their not allowing themſelves time and leiſure to weigh and eſtimate the Force of them.

That nothing does ſo indiſpoſe and keep off their Minds from enquiring into theſe Truths of the greateſt importance to their real Happineſs, as Vice and Immorality: It being unhappily become the Intereſt of reſolutely wicked Men, to wiſh there may be no Juſt and Righteous God, who will Judge, Condemn, and Punish them.

That the more Men accuſtom themſelves calmly and impartially to look into their own Nature and State, and to Practiſe Godlineſs and Virtue in their Converſation; the more and undoubted a belief of God will be rooted in their Souls; and in the whole progreſs of their Lives, they will have a more ſtedfaſt reliance on him.

Laſtly, that God has left no Men without Witneſſes of his Juſtice, Goodneſs, and Power; and that therefore if they perſevere in ſtupid infidelity to the time of their Death, their Crime will be unpardonable, and inexcusable.

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Let us then, with the twenty four elders, fall down before him who sitteth on the Throne, and worship him for ever and ever: And with a profound Humility declare, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created, Rev. 4.*

(2.) We shall set the Lord always before us; and nothing will more encourage our Souls to wait only on God, than for us earnestly to endeavour to have right Notions of the Nature and Attributes of Him.

Several of the Attributes of God have already been made apparent to us, while we were offering Proofs of his Existence.

We could not with a composed and serene Mind contemplate the Works of God in the World, without having his unsearchable Wisdom and Almighty Power, made very visible to us.

What then chiefly remains to be done, is, to treat somewhat more distinctly of them, and to note some wrong Notions and Reasonings about them; and under the last Head of this Discourse, to observe and infer, what Influence they ought to have upon our Lives and Conversations.

And we may note in the first place, that infiniteness is of the Essence, and as it were the Foundation and Root of the Divine Nature, which extends it self to all God's Attributes, and is necessarily imply'd in the Notion or Idea of absolute

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and entire Perfection : As will be evident under the Consideration of every Attribute.

God is said to be Omnipresent, that is, infinite without any Measure or Bounds; he is not confined to any Space, nor excluded from any Place, how secret, or distant soever it be; he puts forth his Power every where, notwithstanding he is pleased to disclose greater degrees of his Majesty and Glory in some places than in others.

God is Omniscient; he knows every thing without limitation; all living Creatures, all inanimate Beings, and all the Parts that go to their Composition. The Circumstances of Things, which occasion our ignorance, put no Restraints on his All-seeing Eye; The deepest Thoughts, and most hidden Deeds, lye as naked and open to his view, as the Actions represented on the most publick Theatres; for the Light and the Darkness are to him alike.

All that hath past in the World, all that is now a doing, all that shall come to pass hereafter, are plainly and equally manifest to him.

He is Omnipotent; can do every thing, which does not imply a contradiction in its own Nature, or is not inconsistent with the Attributes of his Justice, Holiness, and Purity; and it is repugnant to the Nature of Almighty Power, that there should be any thing not dependent on it.

God is Eternal; there being no time in which he was not, nor any time in which he shall not be; he is immutable, not being liable to a shadow

dow of change or variation, nor exposed to the possibility of Corruption or Decay.

His Justice appears from his equal Dealings with the Children of Men, whom he never treated hardly, but suited his Laws to their Nature, and fitted them to their Strength, and enforced their Obedience with sufficient Rewards; and has been so far from punishing them for their Offences above what was just and necessary, that he has always been of the merciful side; and made large abatements, not only of the Weaknesses and Follies, but even of the Willfulness and Obstinacy of Sinners: Inviting even such to Reform, and giving them Time and Means to come off from their ill courses; tempering his Justice with Mercy, and Compassion, and Long-sufferance.

Holiness is essential to God, and consists in the immutable rectitude of his Nature, which wills and does only what is Good, and is averse to all Evil: And such is the infinite Goodness of the Lord, that he willet not the Death of the wicked, nor has any delight in their Destruction, but had rather they should repent and live.

The Sum is, that the God, on whom our Soul does wait, and from whom we have our Expectation, is a Being compleatly Perfect, One, Uncompounded, Eternal, Almighty, Omnipresent, Necessary, Immutable, Incomprehensible, infinitely Good, Wise, Just, Holy, Merciful, and Gracious.

It may now be convenient to discover some wrong Notions of God, repugnant to the Attributes which are essential to his Nature. They have a mean Opinion of God's Power, and a vain one of their own; who think they can live without his Assistance, and judge Prayer and other Parts of Divine Worship unnecessary.

Such Persons have been antiently in the World, and I wish there were not any now, who say, *what is the Almighty that we should serve him; and what Profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* Who presume they can resist his Power, or escape his Justice; and therefore harden their Hearts against him, and yet hope to prosper.

Again: They have a wrong Apprehension of the Almighty Power in the other extreme, who would extend it to Contradictions, and Things absolutely impossible. Such is the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, which implies the same Body to be bigger and less, and also to be in many Places at the same time, and Accidents to subsist without a Subject.

Could this be done by a Miracle, it would not be of use to the Christian Religion. For Christ's Miracles were all evident and manifest to Sense, which it is impossible this should be; but on the contrary, it subverts the evidence of Sense, and consequently must destroy the Authority and Certainty of Revelation.

Epicurus's Notion of God did detract exceedingly from the Divine Perfections; who Taught, that God did not know what was done in the World,

and that it would give him a great deal of trouble to take care of it.

For Trouble or Difficulty in acting, does proceed only from limitation of Knowledge and Power in the Agent ; which can have no Place in an Omniscient and Omnipresent Being, who filleth the Heaven and the Earth with the Glory of his Majesty.

And from the Consideration of the Immensity of the Divine Presence, it appears equally absurd and impious to hold there be many Gods, who take care of the World ; or to suppose there is none.

But we cannot entertain a worse Notion of God, nor more contradictory to his Holiness, than that which makes him the Author of Sin ; who can do no Evil himself, neither tempteth he any Man to do Evil ; who abhorreth all Wickedness, and is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.

Besides, what could more dishearten a good Man from praying against, and opposing his sinful Lusts and Inclinations, than to hear that God is the Author of them ? Or what would more strongly tempt the Wicked to be wicked still, than to believe their Wickedness to be the result of a Divine Decree ? And that all the Evil they commit, is by the order of God ?

Such Opinions destroy the difference between Virtue and Vice ; take away the Reasons of Rewards and Punishments ; and being admitted, would by direct consequence put an end to Religion and Morality. No, the Righteous Lord loveth

loveth Righteousness. *Plato* declared, we must with all our Powers oppose the Opinion, that God is the Cause of Evil, who is essentially Good.

Further, it is a Reflection on the Holiness of God, to hope to atone his Displeasure by outward Austerities and Penance, which have no influence on the Mind and Life.

Who can think that the wearing a coarse Garment, or going bare foot in a Pilgrimage or a Procession, or the repeating every Day a precise number of Prayers in some particular Churches, can prevail with God to put up the Sword, to remove Plagues, or to stop Earthquakes; if after the Exercise of such bodily Rigors, Men should suffer Pride, and Malice, and Cruelty, and unclean Lusts to Rule in their Hearts, and to corrupt their Manners?

Against Religion so superficial, God has declared his dislike in all times, and condemned the *Form of Godliness without the power of it*, both in the Law and the Gospel; so that they who depend upon the outward shew only, to make themselves acceptable to God, will deceive their own Souls.

Further, we must neither admit such large Conceptions of the Goodness of God, as will encourage Men to persist in an ill Life; nor such severe Notions of his Justice, as may fright them from coming to him, and from humbling themselves in his Presence, and begging Assistance against their Sins,

The Goodness of God acting always agreeably to his Holiness, can never approve or like any Person that abides still in his Sins; it will not allow or indulge him in any evil way, nor give him any hope of Pardon, but upon Terms of Repentance. It will neither shew Fondness and Favour without a dutiful Submission; nor conceive Displeasure without being provoked by a just Offence.

But the Divine Goodness is well consistent with all that sharpness of Punishment which is necessary for the recovery of the wicked; and will also give way to long provoked Justice, and suffer hardened and impenitent Sinners to Perish by the Destruction of their own chusing.

Wherefore, tho' Men can have no Ground to trust in the goodness of God, while they have not a Mind to turn from their Wickedness; yet he is ready to receive, and encourage, and support all that are weary of their Sin, and are sensible of the Load of their Iniquities, and very desirous to part with them.

We ought not to give Countenance to such Perswasions concerning God, as to represent his Justice so Severe and Terrible, that Notorious Offenders have no ground to hope for Pardon and Acceptance upon their penitential return to him. For they tempt Men to dread and fly from God as a Destroyer; when it is the end of that Religion he has established in the World, to bring them to him; and in the various Declarations of his Will, he hath ever tender'd to Sinners equitable Terms of Reconciliation.

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How false then are those Doctrines, which put Men out of Hopes of Obtaining the Means of Salvation, which Christ brought down from Heaven; and make them Despair of that Mercy and Compassion, which he hath most solemnly promised in his Holy Gospel; which was made and published on purpose for Fallen Men to see and find the Way of being restored to the Love and Favour of God.

Therefore, as on the one Hand we may conclude God will be offended with us if we neglect him, and withdraw his Grace if we despise it; so we may be assured on the other, that he will never be Angry without Reason, nor beyond Measure: That his Corrections will be allayed with Mercy, and that he will never impose or insist upon impossible Conditions of recovering his Friendship.

Indeed, as his Justice, Purity, and Wisdom cannot bear with us, and patiently behold us while we are prophaning his Holy Name, or doing wrong to our Neighbours, or defiling our own Souls with Brutish Lusts: so if we unfeignedly Repent, heartily Love, and humbly Adore him; he will forgive our Trespases, and be willing to do us all Good; he will Comfort and carry us through Troubles, and satisfy all our Pious and Reasonable Desires.

(3.) We ought to endeavour to have a just Sense of our *Duty* to God, arising from the Considerations of his most perfect Nature, and our great Obligations to him.

To know God, is the most desirable and best knowledge our Minds can be stored with; and to perform to God that Duty which proceeds from our Knowledge of his Nature, is the most profitable Thing we can do for our selves. Our being Conscious that we have made it the end of our Lives to be conformable to the Will and Pleasure of him, will replenish our Hearts with Peace and Joy.

It will yield us the highest Satisfaction, and be inseparable from us in all States and Conditions: It will follow us to the other World, and be a great part of our Happiness there.

Thus the Man of Wisdom affirms, *To know thee is perfect righteousness, to know thy power is the root of Immortality*, Wisdom 15. 2. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*, John 17. 3. The Way to Eternal Life is to believe the Existence of God, to acknowledge his absolute Dominion, to be Obedient in every Instance of Duty, which he has expressly Commanded, or which naturally follows from his particular Attributes.

If our Soul waits only upon God; if we set the Lord always before us; if we have the Divine Perfections always in View, whenever we are engaging in Business; it will oblige us to be very careful, and strictly exact how we carry our selves.

We shall be cautious how we intermeddle in any Thing that has but the Appearance of Sin, lest we should unadvisedly be surprized and betrayed into Evil. We shall be very Tender and

Precise

Precise in the Judgments we form of Things, and be frequently comparing our Designs with the Rules of our Duty, that we may not be beguiled by the deceitfulness of Sin.

If we set the Lord always before us, and our Souls are only waiting upon him; the Meditation of his Attributes will powerfully Influence and sway us in Things of the greatest Moment.

His Holiness will raise a hatred of Insincerity in our Minds, and cause us to abhor Carnal Lusts, and to refrain from Impure and Licentious Conversation. His Justice will convince us, that we are never treated worse than we deserve; and that we ought quietly to bear the Hardships of Life, and the Injuries of Men; as believing there could be no Cause of Complaint, were our Sufferings more sharp and severe than they are; and that the crosses of the World ought to Moderate and Abate our Affections to it; and to cause us with greater Diligence and Earnestness to seek the Treasure above, which cannot be taken from us by the Force of our Enemies, nor be consumed or impaired by any length of Time.

Apprehensions of the Divine Omnipresence will banish Prophaneness, Vanity, and Looseness from our Behaviour, and engage us to Gravity and Sobriety in our Deportment, to Decency and Reverence, and Humbleness in our Devotions, both in the Private of the Closet, and in places of Publick Worship; and to modesty and seriousness in our Retirements. The very Thought of Almighty Power will make us dread
giving

giving the least Offence to our Supreme Lord, and best Friend; and to have much greater regard of him, in all the Projects and the whole Conduct of our Lives, who can Destroy both Body and Soul, and cast them into Hell, than of Impotent Man who can only kill the Body. The Infinite Goodness of God will oblige us, with the deepest Affection, and highest gratitude, to Love and Praise him for the excellent Nature he bestowed upon us, and for the unspeakable Kindness he has shewn in our daily Preservation; and to rely perpetually on his Providence, and to depend entirely on his Bounty and Care for the Blessings we now partake of, and for the Favour and Mercy we hope for hereafter.

Meditations of the unbounded Goodness of God, will vehemently incline, and strongly determine us to do all possible good to our Fellow Creatures, who have his Divine Image stamped on them; and to contribute, as far as ever we can, to the Relief of the Wants and Miseries of our poor distressed Neighbours. Trust in his Goodness will possess our Souls with Sedateness and Tranquillity in the worst of Times; it will give us a greatness of Mind, and dispose us to use our Enemies well, and not to insult their Misfortunes, but to treat with Generosity those whom the vicissitude of Things has laid at our Feet and Mercy.

It will give us an undaunted Courage amidst the most frightful Dangers, which a strict adherence to the Cause of God and Religion may have

have brought upon us: And will inspire into our Hearts Resolution and Firmness against Death it self.

Now as nothing does so flatten and imbitter the Pleasures of Life, as the Apprehensions of Death; so nothing can make the Thoughts of dying easy and tolerable, but the fixing our Love and Expectations only upon God, and the exercise of true Religion and Virtue.

The approaches of Death will bring but little Terror to a Man, who has not misplaced his Care on vain and perishing Things; but with Diligence and Constancy has applied his Thoughts in making sure the Salvation of his Soul, that better part which cannot be taken away.

How pleasant and refreshing must the first appearances and dawns of the bright Coelestial World above be to him, who has been contemplating of it all his Life! how desirable, how inexpressibly delightful will be his Admission into the presence of the Almighty God, whose Nature he has studied to know, whose Will he has laboured to observe; whose Divine Perfections, so far as Men are capable, he has continually, zealously, and humbly strived to imitate.

He who has lived so in all the Parts of his Life, as wicked Men, when they come to die, will wish they themselves had done; and has applied himself to every Thing with that Moderation and Circumspection, as if he was presently to give God an Account of it; must be Easy, must be Serene, must be Joyful at the point of his Departure hence, which will open so large and bright

bright a Region of Glory for his Soul to enter and dwell in for ever.

I conclude all with the Judgment of the Wise Man upon this Matter. *The fear of the Lord is honour, and glory, and gladness, and a Crown of rejoycing. The fear of the Lord maketh a merry Heart, and giveth joy and gladness, and a long life. Whoso feareth the Lord, it shall go well with him at the last, and he shall find favour in the day of his Death,* Ecclesiasticus 1. 11, 12, 13. Which God of his infinite Mercy grant unto us all.

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mon and Circumposition, as if he was presently to give God an Account of it; must be fully and be serene, must be joyful at the point of his Departure hence, which will open to large and bright



SERMON XII.

2 COR. VII. I.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

N the Church of Corinth were dangerous Seducers, who set themselves up in Opposition to the Authority of St. Paul, and would have destroy'd the Doctrines of true Faith, and the Precepts of Holy Life, which he had deliver'd to them.

The Errors spread by these ill-minded Men, were not about little or indifferent things, but concerning Matters of the highest Moment and Consequence. Among their other pernicious Notions, they maintained, that the Dead were not to rise out of their Graves; a Doctrine most uncomfortable

comfortable to the New Christians, who were already in a State of Persecution; and which would have utterly defeated all the Designs of the Gospel. For could they have undermined the Belief of the Resurrection, which is a most Necessary and Fundamental Article of the Christian Religion; they would also have pull'd down the Article of a Future Judgment, and the Rewards and Punishments of the next World, which are all builded on this Foundation.

Wherefore St. Paul, to support his Apostolical Power, and to suppress and extirpate these malignant and deadly Opinions, which would effectually Subvert the Church he had lately planted; he writes this and the former Epistle to the *Corinthians*, full of Affection, Wisdom and Piety.

Where we may observe him constantly to join a good Life with Faith in Christ. At the same time that he requires us to believe the Mysteries of the Gospel, he commands us to pay Obedience to the Holy Laws thereof.

For as our Faith grows, so must our Charity, which is the Life and Spirit of it, and without which it would die and prove ineffectual; an increase in the Knowledge of Heavenly Truth, obliging us to abound in Works of Charity, in Purity and Holiness.

Some Verses before the Text, he exhorts them to leave the company of *unbelievers and idolaters*: *For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? Chap. 6. 14, &c. What concord hath*
Christ

Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that beliovetb, with an infidel? And what agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols? They were become the Temple of the living God; and he had promised to dwell in them, and to live in them; and to be their God, and that they should be his People; and that if they would come out from among them, he would be a father unto them, and they should be his Sons and Daughters.

The good Apostle thought it neither safe nor suitable for his new Converts, who, upon due Consideration, had renounced their vain and impious Opinions, and reformed their ill and scandalous Manners; still usually to converse with those, who retained their gross Errors, and continued in the vile practice of their old Sins.

He could by no means approve their associating themselves with Idolaters, now they did, with so much Reason, abhor the Worship of false Gods; nor hear the prophane Talk, or behold the immodest and unseemly Behaviour of the unbelieving Gentiles, after they had set themselves apart, and consecrated their Souls and Bodies to be Temples, for the Habitation of the infinitely pure and glorious God, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

Having therefore these most inestimable promises, that God will make us Temples for himself to dwell in; and that he will be our Father, and we shall be his Children; let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the Flesh and Spirit; not only from the Sins which we have committed with

with our Bodies, but from those we have only been guilty of in our Heart or Will; improving and growing more perfect, by the Divine Assistance, in the Practice of all the Christian Graces and Duties of Holiness, out of a deep and sincere Fear and Reverence of God.

(1.) In the words of the Text it may be observ'd, that the Apostle supposes them to be in a Holy State or Condition.

(2.) He exhorts them to improve themselves in this Holy Condition, and to endeavour after greater measure of Perfection in it; They must abound in every good Work, and grow in Grace; not only add one Virtue to another till they have attained them all, but heighten the degree of every single Virtue in their Souls.

III. The Apostle supposes them to be in a Holy State or Condition. To entitle us to a Right in the Holy State, we must believe that God is; that we received our Beings, Soul and Body from him; that we are preserved by his Providence, and subsist by his Bounty, who bestows on us every thing, not only necessary for our Life, but our Happiness. And that, when the Faculties and Powers of our Nature had been corrupted and impaired by the Transgression of our first Parents, he sent his only Son Jesus Christ to lay down his Life, to save ours; and by the inestimable Merit of his Death and Passion, to procure the Pardon of God for our Sins, and to restore us to the State of Primitive Purity:

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And that therefore we, who were created by the Almighty Power of God, and rescued from the Guilt, and Dominion, and Punishment of our Sins, by the effusion of the Blood of Christ; have the highest obligation on us, to pay entire Obedience to the Author of our Beings, and to the Redeemer of our forfeited Lives.

So that if we be true Members of this Holy State; the Love and Fear of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, will be the governing Principle of our Hearts, and have a powerful Sway and Influence over all our Actions.

Our chief Designs will be to promote his Glory, and to preserve our Interest in his Favour. And there can be no Post so honourable in this World, nothing so Profitable, no Temptation so violent and pleasing to our sinful Appetite; that we will presume to violate any known Law of God to obtain it, and so wilfully incur his Displeasure, and deeply wound our Conscience, by acting against the plain Dictates thereof.

The necessary Conditions then of the Holy State, are, that we diligently and carefully instruct our selves in all the Duties of it; and that we courageously engage our selves to perform whatever we have found to be our Duty; *i. e.* that we impartially and thoroughly inquire what is best in our Condition and Circumstances for us to do, and always with Faith and Sincerity do it. And with stedfast Practise, we shall not only abide secure in the Holy State, but make great proficiency therein.

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This Discourse may, perhaps, become more instructive, if we should reflect on some Errors, into which Persons have fallen, with respect to the Holy State : For Men have erred, according to their different Tempers and Constitutions, in both extremes.

Some have presumed their Souls to be in a safe and good Condition without any true Ground ; and others have despaired of the Countenance and Favour of God, without any just Reason.

I shall now name some sorts or kinds of Men, either who have no pretence to the Favour and Mercy of God, or who have but little if any to it, and whose Case is very doubtful and dangerous.

(1.) They never can pretend any claim to the Holy State, who have no Holiness at all. Such are those who openly profess infidelity ; and not only reject Religion and Virtue, but despise them : Who hastily, and rashly, and as it were by Rote, say in their Heart, without Consideration, Reason, or Proof, *That there is no God* :

Who would have it thought, that the Heavens and the Earth, in which appear numberless Marks and Characters of infinite Wisdom, were produced, and are continued, meerly by Chance, or blind Fate, without any understanding and wise Mind or Being to preside over, govern and direct them : And that They themselves are under a fatal Necessity, notwithstanding the clear Experience they have of their own Liberty, the Remorse they feel, and the Pardon they ask for the Folly
of

of their Actions, and the Injuries with which they have provoked others.

They are so stupid and senseless with regard to Spiritual Things, and believe Prayers and Praises and the other parts of Divine Worship to be so unprofitable, that they neither desire, nor would be so much as thankful for a Right or Title to the Mercy and Favour of God made out for them. They rather chuse to let themselves loose to all Ungodliness and Uncleaness; to *sit in the chair of the scorner*; and not only to make a mock at Sin, but to commit it with greediness; and to use the very Breath they receive from God, to blaspheme and defy him.

(2.) They have no right to the Holy State, who notwithstanding they do not publicly declare for Atheism and Impiety, yet have no true Religion at Bottom. For the profession they at any Time make of being Religious, does not proceed from the sincere Love of God, but from a design to promote their Interest in the World. They do not therefore order the Course of their Lives by the Holy Rules of the Gospel, but only so far make shew of doing so, as may gain them Reputation among Men, and advance their secular Credit.

They are, to the Life, described by the Prophet Esay, as *drawing near God with their Mouth, and honouring him with their Lips, but in their Hearts being removed far from him.* But God has been pleased to warn us by his inspired Writers, *That Hypocrites heap up wrath*
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against

against the day of wrath; that fear shall surprize them, and that their hope shall perish; and that it will be most dreadful to have our Portion with Hypocrites.

(3.) They can never be secure of being in God's Favour, who having honest and good Intentions, yet for the most part suffer themselves to be conquered by their Temptations; the Motions of the sensual Appetite prevailing generally against the Holy Suggestions of the Mind.

For can the seriously repenting of a Sin, prove such a plea as God will graciously allow, if at the return of the next Temptation and Opportunity, a Man shall commit the same Crime again?

The Things they would do, they do not; and the Things which they hate, those they do. The Love of sensual Pleasures commonly prevails over the Love of God; so that they give more of their Consent to Vice, than they do to Morality and Virtue. Now if Sin be the ruling party that has Dominion over them; it will be impossible that their Soul should be a suitable dwelling for a God of unspotted Purity and Righteousness to Inhabit; especially when it is considered, that God requires no more of us than he enables us to perform; and that if we pray'd heartily for the Divine Assistance, if we watched carefully, and avoided all the next Occasions of Sin, and sincerely and resolutely opposed Temptations, we might be able to mortify the

the Lusts of the Flesh, and to subdue the vile Affections thereof.

(4.) And lastly, there is no ground to encourage Men to think their Spiritual Condition good and Acceptable to God, who customarily allow themselves to commit any one heinous Sin.

For several particular Sins are of so malignant a Nature, that God has peremptorily declared, he will exclude those from the Kingdom of Heaven, who habitually practice any one of them.

I do not speak of what may happen, when Men are in a great Passion, or where the surprise is sudden and unexpected; but of the Habit or Custom of committing any deadly Sin.

Indeed, the Malicious Invention of a Falshood, which will spoil a Man of his Good Name; a deliberate Perjury, which will rob him of his Estate; or in cold Blood to plot and compass the Murder of our Neighbour: as each of these will forfeit the Interest we had in God's Favour, so they are not to be looked on as single Sins; because to their being brought forth, a preceeding Scene of Wickedness must be laid in the Mind, when these Monstrous Iniquities are contrived and forged.

Wherefore to make our Ways pleasing to the Lord, we ought to render, not only sincere, but equal and universal Obedience unto his Laws; which will not consist with a Presumption to exempt our selves from the Authority and Observation of any one Divine Law.

From the foregoing Discourse we may fairly and truly draw this Conclusion, that the Persons who commit Sin with reluctancy of Conscience, and even with Grief and Tears reflect upon their Folly; but however, when they are tempted, relapse into the same Sins again, which gave their Minds that Pain and Trouble: tho' they are the best among the bad Men, and of whom there is some Hopes, yet they have not arrived at that height of Goodness, which God will approve.

The infirm Christians then, in the lowest Degree of the Holy State, yield Obedience to the Laws of God, tho' with great Difficulty; they Conquer their Lusts, but not without Violent Struglings; they Demolish the strong holds of the *Devil*, but with much Labour and Contention: For their Flesh is not so compleatly subdued, but it makes a vigorous Opposition to the Spirit: By the Spirit we understand the Mind enlightened and assisted by the Grace of God; which, so supported, will become sufficient to undertake and accomplish all Holy Duties upon a true and sound Principle, the Fear, Love, and Honour of the Lord.

2. We come now to represent some of the Happy Consequences of Weak Christians improving in the state of Grace.

(1.) Constancy in the Practice of Piety, will make all the Actions and Duties of Religion more easy to be performed, and render us more willing to set about them.

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For if by Use and Custom we may be reconciled to hard Labour; and even the Things, from which we have an Aversion, become tolerable; and if Yokes and Chains, a great while worn, harden and strengthen the Fibres and Muscles, and long usage abates the acute Pains they caused when first put on; certainly much more, Things in themselves fit, and just, and reasonable, and agreeable to the Original Constitution of Human Nature, as all the Works of true Religion be; will, by our frequent exercising our selves in them, grow very practicable and easy.

So great is the Power of Religious Custom, that the Soul longs for the return of Times and Seasons of worshipping God; it engages in them with Fervency, Love, and Reverence; and continually and zealously strives to obtain greater Measures of the Heavenly Graces and Virtues, and in higher Degrees to partake of the communicable Perfections of the Divine Nature.

(2.) As a steady perseverance in the Exercises of Religion will make us Easy, and remove the Difficulties and Troubles which might Accompany our first Entrance on a Holy and Pious Course of Life; so the easiness we find in God's Service, will cause it to be more pleasant and delightful.

For humbly and earnestly to beg of God the Pardon of our Sins, who alone has Power to Forgive them; and that he would enable us to live innocently, and to die peaceably, who has Life and Death in his Hands; and to

testify the sincere gratitude of our Soul, by daily magnifying the Power, admiring the Wisdom, and adoring the goodness of God, our best Friend, our greatest Benefactor, and our most Compassionate Father; to do all the Good, and shew all the Mercy we can to our Neighbours, especially of the Household of Faith; to preserve Purity and Patience, and Contentment in our Souls, and Holiness and Righteousness in our whole Conversation; are deeds which carry with them Quiet and Satisfaction, and leave behind them ever flowing Fountains of indefeasible and uninterrupted Pleasure and Joy.

(3.) The Ease and Delight which arises from having turned Acts into Habits of Piety and Virtue, are the most powerful Motives for us to persevere in a Godly Life to the End, and the greatest security against relapsing into our former Wickedness.

When a long Custom of Holy Living has vanquish'd all the Difficulties which attended the beginning of it, and the remembrance of a Man's good Works make his Conscience serene and joyful; the Danger of his falling away can be but little; and the Heavenly Virtues he has acquired, will be so many Guards and Preservatives against it.

His Humility will guard him from presuming too much in his own Strength, and from needlessly coming into the way of a temptation, where he has no Divine Warrant that he shall master it. His Experience of God's Help and Favour in former Troubles, will make him stoutly to resist the Allurement of unlawful Pleasure, and patiently to

to bear Troubles and Pains, rather than comply with any evil thing.

He that long has had the Pleasure and Satisfaction to feed the Hungry, cloth the Naked, and to deliver the innocent from their merciless Oppressors; will scarce again sink into the sordid love of Riches, and harden his Heart against his poor Neighbours.

The Sense of Religion and Humanity deeply rooted in his Mind, will oblige him in his whole Conduct to have a regard to Truth, Justice, Equity, and Compassion. By his Christian Friendship he will hold himself engaged not only to be useful to Men in the Concerns of this Life, but to incite and press them to the attainment of greater Measures of Virtue.

The Benignity of his Nature will constantly dispose him to put the fairest and best Construction on Mens Actions, and to excuse, if not to commend them, so far as it will consist with the Truth and their Good; and as he never can meanly and insincerely flatter and encourage Men in their great Faults, so neither will he morosely censure their little Infirmities.

It may now be proper to endeavour the removing of some Scruples and Difficulties that perplex very honest Men, and cause them to doubt whether they be in the Grace and Favour of God, and to despair of arriving at such degrees of Perfection, as will fit and qualify them for the Kingdom of Heaven. They object, that if they were upon good Terms with their merciful Father,

ther, they should be more sensible of their Spiritual Improvements, and find greater Peace, Serenity, and Joy upon the discharge of their Religious Offices.

But in Answer, they ought to know, that the want of delight in God's Service, does sometimes proceed, not from the fault of the Mind, but the indisposition of the Body :

And that God will no more punish Men for bodily Indispositions, and lowness of Spirits, which they cannot alter and help ; than for malignant Diseases, which they can neither prevent nor cure.

Besides, Providence may permit Holy Men to be under trouble, for the exercise of their Faith, the tryal of their Patience, and the increase of their Trust in God alone ; and at length, scattering the Clouds, give to the Rewards of their Godliness and Probity, a more sweet and lasting Relish.

Let us but continue steadfast in the Practise of our Duty, altho' at present it be not so delightful ; and there will be no ground for us, either to doubt of the Love of God, or of our progress towards Heaven.

Fervent Prayers, and pious Meditations, are the proper Food of the Soul ; by the constant use whereof, it will certainly wax stronger and firmer in Faith and Charity, however we may not, at some times, so sensibly feel and discern it. So we are sure of the growth of Plants, not destitute of Nourishment ; altho' the act of growing is never perceptible by our Senses,

But it is further Objected by disconsolate Christians: (1.) That they despond of ever rising to such a pitch of Virtue, as they find related of many of the People of God, (2.) That they observe in some of the Holy Writings, that a faultless and unfinning Obedience is made the Terms of everlasting Life; and that our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, commands us to be *perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, who is a Being of infinite Goodness and Perfection.

(1.) To the first difficulty it may be answer'd, that tho' they never rise to such a glorious pitch of Virtue, as many of God's faithful Servants have done, yet their Souls may be in a safe Condition. Because there will be different Orders and Degrees of Honour in the Celestial Mansions; *one Star will shine above another Star in glory*; and they who shall not be allowed to sit on the Right Hand of Christ, may be admitted to be Doorkeepers in his House.

We find the failings of *Noah, David, Hezekiah, St. Peter*, and other eminent Saints, Men after God's own Heart, and who loved and served him with all their Powers; to be recorded in Scripture, as a caution to the best Men of the highest Attainments, not to be too secure; and as an Encouragement to the feeble, but sincere worshippers of God, not to despair; and that they may turn from the Wickedness they have done, and by God's Gracious Pardon, save their Souls alive: but not as a Temptation to bold Sinners,

to think they may offend Heaven without Danger.

For albeit God will not *quench the smoking flax*, and not *break the bruised reed*, that is, he will not discourage nor reject the least degrees of Sincerity; yet with a Rod of Iron will he smite hardened and prophane Criminals; there being no place left for Pity and Commiseration to them, without deep Repentance, who defy Almighty Power, and despise immense Goodness.

(2.) As to the other Difficulty taken from Passages of Holy Scripture, that seem to make entire and unfinning Obedience the Condition of obtaining everlasting Life; we may observe in the same inspired Authors, that there be other places, which soften and qualify that Rigor of Divine Justice, which seems to be contained in them, and by which they ought to be interpreted and explained.

Thus St. James, who affirms that *whosoever keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, is guilty of all*; also teaches us, that *in many things we offend all*; and exhorts Christians to *confess their faults one to another*.

So also St. John, who pronounces that *he that committeth sin, is of the devil*; and that *whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin*; likewise declares, that *if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us*; and that *we make the Lord a liar, and that his word is not in us*.

For

For the brief clearing this Matter, we, in the first place, observe, that such a Sense cannot be put upon these Passages, as is repugnant to the Truth of God, contained in his Holy Word.

Nor, in the next place, must such an Interpretation be affix'd to these inspired Writers, as makes them to contradict themselves.

No Exposition likewise can be admitted, which will bring Men upon the level with our ever blessed Saviour, who alone was found to be free from all Sin, without spot or blemish.

Therefore we are to understand them of abiding in the Custom of committing Sin; or of deliberately and wilfully doing any known great Sin, in contempt of the Authority of God, in violation of the Faith, Duty, and Allegiance we owe to him, and with the sharp Remonstrances of our own Conscience. For if the Spirit had got the mastery of the Flesh, and we truly and sincerely loved God above every thing in the World; then those unfeigned and pious Affections which firmly inclined us to observe some of the Commandments, would undoubtedly oblige us, without picking, or chusing, or any hesitation and demur, faithfully to keep the rest.

We come now to the Holy Precept of our Blessed Master, *Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect*; which rightly understood, can have nothing amazing or dreadful in it: For no Man's Understanding can be so shallow, as to imagine the words should be taken in a strict Sense; as if a poor crawling Worm was to vie and compare Perfections with his Almighty Maker:

ker. They must be restrained to our finite Nature; we are to be perfect as God, not in an equality, but in similitude and resemblance; so far as weak, imperfect, and limited Creatures, can imitate boundless and unlimited Perfections. We shall know the meaning of our Lord's Command more fully, by taking notice of the occasion of it.

Our Lord reprehended the narrow Spirit of the *Jews*, who confined their Bounty to their Neighbourhood, and shew'd kindness chiefly to their wealthy Friends, who would not be long in their Debt; moved more by lucre, and the expectation of something more valuable than what they gave, than by a heavenly Principle of doing good.

Wherefore he exhorts his Disciples to an Universal Benevolence, like that of God, who makes his Sun to Shine on the Just and Unjust. Be ye perfect then, in the amplitude and extensiveness of your Charity; which must Comprehend not only your Relations and Acquaintance, but Strangers and your Enemies; not only those who can return your Favour, but those who have nothing to Repay; not only the Friends who have obliged you in their Courtesies, but the Enemies which have provoked you by their Injuries.

And in so doing, you will be judged truly to Copy the Divine Perfections, and transfer so large a Measure of them to your own Souls, as they will have a Capacity to receive.

That

That by Perfection here, Charity is principally to be understood, we have a Demonstration from *St. Luke*: For he making a Relation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, in the same place represents our Saviour's Sense in these Words, *Be ye therefore Merciful, as your Father also is Merciful*, Luke 6. 36.

And *St. Paul* recommending the Imitation of the Divine Perfections, exhorts them to be followers of God, as dear Children; and to walk in Love, as Christ had loved us.

In so much that if there be any Thing which will refresh and heighten the Image of God in our Souls; if there be any Virtue that will increase our Likeness and Resemblance of him, and make us more partake of his Perfections; if there be any Grace that will abate, extenuate, cover, and make Way for the Pardon of our daily Failings and Infirmities, that will more signally entitle us to the Protection of Providence, and that will dispose Men sincerely to love us, deeply to esteem us, readily to assist and defend us in want or danger; it is universal Love and Charity, and the doing all the good we can to all Men, and in the highest Degrees we are able; and where our Arm can reach no farther, to let them participate of our Good-will, to have our best Wishes and Recommendations, and a large share in our hearty Prayers.

And for this reason *St. Paul* declares all other Christian Excellencies, and the Persons also endowed with them, without Charity to be nothing: And that Charity is the end (*i. e.* the Perfection

fection designed) by the Law: And that they must put *on Charity, which is the bond of Perfection*. And what a blessed Change will be wrought in our Nature, and such as will please Angels who delight in the Conversion of Sinners; when those Eyes which were entertained with vain Sights and Shews, which are hardly so much as Shadows of true and solid Pleasure; shall now be taken up in diligently searching for Objects duly qualified, either for our Instruction, or our Bounty.

When our Ears which stood always open to receive trifling Stories or malicious Slanders, shall now be most attentive to the Cries of the Poor, and ready to hear the Complaints of those that Grieve and Labour under their Afflictions; and our Hands, which were frequently exercised in Acts of Folly or Violence, shall now be employed, in distributing Relief among the Necessitous, or in delivering the Humble and Innocent from their Cruel Oppressors.

Much Good will redound to the World, and much Honour accrew to you, by such a Heavenly Conversation.

How much will those Penitent Sinners Magnify the Providence of God, and Extol and Love your Charity; who by your wise teaching came to the Knowledge of their Duty, and by your seasonable and kind Reproofs perceived the Dangers of a wicked Life, and broke off their Sins by a timely and true Repentance.

I would make this further Reflection on the present Subject, that nothing more than the

Love

Love of God and of our Brother, will preserve and augment Humility, Temperance, Contentment, and Purity in our own Souls.

It may here be also of true Use, to recommend Method and Order to you in your whole Conduct; which consists in allotting proper and suitable Seasons, both for the Exercises of Devotion, and for the Affairs of the World, and in strictly observing them.

This will much contribute to guard us against Temptations to Sin, and hinder us from omitting the great Duties of Religion; and we ought to observe that the Faults of good Men consist mostly, by reason of Business or Indisposition, in Omissions of some Parts of their Duty.

But the Three great Things of which I have already treated, and would again remind you of, are Sincerity, Integrity, and Perseverance in our Duty. We must perfect Holiness in the Fear of God. Not Ostentation, or the Praise of Men, but the Fear, Reverence, and Love of God, is the Spring, and first Mover in all true Religion.

In the next Place our Obedience must be entire, and equally extend it self to all the Divine Precepts: Neither Riches, nor sensual Pleasure, nor the evil Customs of the World, must tempt us to judge any of God's Commandments to be little or inconsiderable, nor entice us willingly to offend against them.

Lastly, we must be constantly proceeding and advancing higher in our Christian State; for Religion and Virtue consist in Action, and we ought to be pressing forward towards the Prize.

But if we put our Talent in a Napkin ; if we go backward, or but stand still ; our Holy Dispositions will relent and decay, and wither ; and before we can recover our selves, the Door may be shut, and we find no Entrance. May it therefore be our great and constant Work, to subdue, and pull up by the Roots, Pride, Vanity, Malice, Anger, and Lust, on this side of the Grave : May all Sins die in us, before we come to die our selves ; and may our Souls, having thus overcome their deadly Enemies, supported on the Wings of Faith and Charity, ascend to the glorious Region above.

May we, according to the Advice of the excellent Apostle, *add to our Faith, Virtue ; to Virtue, Knowledge ; and to Knowledge, Temperance ; and to Temperance, Patience ; and to Patience, Godliness ; and to Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness ; and to Brotherly-Kindness, Charity.* And that these Graces and Virtues may ever be in us, and abound, *God of his Infinite Mercy grant.*

SER-



SERMON XIII.

ROMANS XV. 13.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that ye may abound in hope, thro' the power of the Holy Ghost.

IN the beginning of this Chapter, St. Paul declares, that the Strong, who had made a great Progress in the Religion of Jesus Christ, should not please themselves in the Use of indifferent Things, if that Innocent Pleasure could not be taken without offending their weaker Brethren, who did not so truly understand their Christian Liberty.

But that they ought to gratify and condescend to them, where such Condescension to their Infirmities was likely either to help their Faith

or increase their Piety. It well becoming us to deny the Enjoyment to our selves of that which we may lawfully have; and to yield to the weakness of our Ignorant Neighbour, what he has no Right to claim, in order to promote his Spiritual Good and Edification.

And this the Apostle signifies we are obliged to by the Example of our Master Christ, who being Lord of All, even pleased not himself. For he did not come into the World, to be entertained with the Delights of a private Life, without any Consideration of the Welfare of others; nor to exercise Arbitrary Dominion over Men, only for his own Pleasure, and to shew his Power and Glory.

His Designs in leaving Heaven, proceeding from his infinite Love, were of a different Nature; they were to redeem Men from the extremely miserable Condition, into which they had fallen by breaking the Righteous Laws of God.

And therefore, that he might satisfy the injured Justice of God, and become an Example of all Righteousness to Men, he condescended both to do and suffer all that should be required of them, as the Condition of their Salvation.

To which end, he took upon him the Form of a Servant, and made his Appearance in a mean and low Condition, without Pomp or Show, without Armies either to guard himself, or to give Disturbance to others; meaning to Conquer the World by the Power of his Spirit, and not by Force of Arms.

He

He not only taught Men the Holy Rules of their Duty, but recommended and enforced them by his own Practice. In order to accommodate himself to all the Necessities of his distressed Brethren, he submitted to bear the vilest Reproaches and Slanders that could be cast upon his Reputation, and to endure the sharpest Pains and Torments which could be inflicted on his Body; and at length suffered Death it self, that he might Atone and Pacify the Wrath of God, and Purify and Restore the Corrupted Mass of Mankind to the Acceptance and Favour of God. Thus the Son of God kindly reclaims Men from their Sins by his own Example; mercifully procures the Pardon of their Sins by his own Death; and has opened the Way to their Resurrection to Life and Immortality by his own rising from the Dead.

St. Paul presses this Argument further upon all Christians, of mutual yielding and Compliance; in that Christ had not restrained his Goodness and Compassion to the People of one Family or Nation, but made himself both the Minister of the Circumcision, (preaching, in Person, his Gospel to the *Jews*, That heavenly and spiritual Religion, which their burdensome and numerous Ceremonies did typify and shadow;) and the Saviour of the *Gentiles*, whom, by his Apostles and Ministers, he called from the Worship of impotent and stupid Idols, to the Service of the One only true God.

Now if Christ received no Advantage by his infinite Mercy to us, since there could be no Ad-

dition made to his perfect and most glorious Condition; and if we had no pretence of Right to his Favour, which was free and undeserved, and yet the greatest we are capable of receiving; how just and reasonable is it, that after his Example, we should study, further, and promote the Good, especially of the precious Souls, of our Neighbours :

Universal Charity being a first Principle and Fundamental Duty of the Religion whereof Christ had now made the *Gentiles* to partake; and for which Mercy, *St. Paul* writes, they should, according to the Prediction of the Antient Prophets, give Glory to God, and Rejoyce with his People : It having a stronger Influence on the Minds of Men, and advancing Morality higher, than the profoundest Philosophers ever had done.

And that they might Evidence the Truth of their Conversion to Christ, by a Charitable and Holy Conversation; he concludes his Exhortation with a hearty Prayer, *That the God of Hope would fill them with all Joy, and Peace in believing; that they might abound in Hope, thro' the Power of the Holy Ghost.*

In which Words are couched the great Characters of the true Religion, tendered by Jesus Christ both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*.

We (1.) have God declared the Author of all the Felicity we have in Possession, or can hope for hereafter.

He

He is the God of Hope ; the Things that are essential to real Happiness are to be found in God alone ; he rules, orders, and disposeth of all, in Heaven above and in Earth below ; our Hopes that come from God, must return, and be fixed upon him ; there being nothing besides him, either sufficient to support the Frailties of our Nature, or satisfy the large Desires of our Soul.

(2.) That the Love and Favour of God is the only Foundation of true Peace and solid Joy : For when Men believe the Doctrines he has revealed, trust to the Promises he has made, and obey the Precepts he has given, he will fill their Minds with all Joy and Peace.

(3.) That these great Blessings of God bestowed on the Men who devoutly Worship him, will not end and be determined with this Life ; but they that are already filled with Joy and Peace in believing, and keeping his Commandments, shall have their Faculties so enlarged, that they shall abound with Hopes of receiving a Hundred-fold greater Blessings in the World to come.

(4.) That neither the Burden of their Duty, nor the Sharpness of their Sufferings in their Christian Course, may discourage Men, and abate their Hopes ; God will sustain and assist them with the Graces of his Spirit : they shall *abound in Hope, thro' the Power of the Holy Ghost,*

Our Text then gives us a just Occasion to set forth the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Religion; which we may do, by shewing in what respects the Religion contained in the Holy Scriptures, surpasses all other Religions that be found in the Writings of the wisest Heathens.

Now it has these great Advantages over them, in respect,

(1.) That it gives a truer and fuller Description of the Nature of God.

(2.) A better and certainer Account of the Creation of the World, and of our selves; of Divine Providence, and our Dependance upon God.

(3.) The Inspired Writings shew Men more certain and plain Ways and Rules of attaining true Happiness.

(4.) They give Men greater assurance, that God will graciously forgive the Sins of them that truly repent.

(5.) They promise more Assistance to Men in performing their Religious Duty. And

(6.) We find in them a fuller and clearer Account of the Immortality of the Soul, and of the Rewards and Punishments in the future State.

(1.) The Holy Scriptures give a truer and fuller Description of the Nature of God.

Notwithstanding, by the great Works of Nature, and the admirable Contrivance and Order of the World, Men might discover the Being of the

the Supreme God ; and some wise Men and Philosophers, had in a great Measure, right and true Notions of him, yet the generality of People did wretchedly sink into Polytheism and Idolatry. And those who spoke truest of God, were often inconsistent with themselves ; the Arguments they used were sometimes weak and inconclusive, and there may be observed in their Discourses much Diffidence and Uncertainty.

The greater Number erred strangely in holding there were many Gods, and assigning such Weaknesses and Defects to them, as were inconsistent with the infinite Being of God.

For among the Gods, who were supposed to have Wisdom and Power, these Attributes were confined to such narrow Limits, that it was needful there should be a God to govern in Heaven, another to Rule on Earth ; one to take care of Health and Sickness, another to order the Affairs of War and Peace ; and indeed there was hardly any thing of moment, which had not a particular God to preside over it.

But so gross was the Stupidity, and so thick the Ignorance of degenerated Men, that whole Countries adored things void of all Reason and Understanding ; the Birds, and four-footed Beasts, the creeping Things, and Trees, and Plants ; And fell down before the Images of Wood and Stone, which they had carv'd with their own Hands.

Whereas had they had a just Apprehension of the infinite and boundless Perfection of God, they must have believed the Notion of a multitude of Gods not only unnecessary, but contradictory

dictory and impossible; and that Infinite Power and Wisdom could as easily and freely take care of the whole Mass and Collection of Beings in the Universe, as of any one single Creature.

Now we ought to observe, that there was nothing sufficient to obliterate and rase out of the Soul of Man, Opinions so false, so dangerous, and so unworthy of the glorious Attributes of God, and so dissonant to Human Reason; but only the Power and Authority of the Holy Scriptures; which always speak consistently of God, and declare him to be but One; and ever represent him to be Eternal, Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Unchangeable, most Holy and Wise, most Faithful and True, Patient, Long-suffering, full of Pity and Compassion, infinitely Good and Gracious: Which Attributes of Goodness and Mercy, are little taken notice of in the best Heathen Writers.

And it is very visible, that the Light of the Gospel, wherever it has shined, has had so great influence on *Turks*, who owe the best things in their *Alcoran* to the Christian Religion; and also on Pagans; as, in a large degree, to put down Polytheism, extirpate Idolatry, and to bring Men back to the Worship of one God.

(2.) In revealed Religion we have a more accurate, particular; and certain Account of the Creation of the World, and of our selves; of Divine Providence, and our Dependance on God,

The

The Philosophers were much in the dark concerning the Creation of the World ; and there seems to have been no settled Opinion in which any great number of them could agree. Some were for the Eternity of the World ; others thought it did happen by the small Parts of Præ-existing Matter falling together by meer Chance, without any wise Artificer to guide and direct them.

The first of which Opinions excludes God out of the World, and the other makes him useless in it.

For if the World be Eternal, it must be self-existent ; and what is self-existent, must be absolutely perfect, and can have no dependence on any thing else.

And if the World was made without God's Power, and doth continue without his Care ; then the Inhabitants thereof have no Obligation to worship and serve him, nor Reason to give him an Account of their Lives.

Others, reflecting upon the impossibility of maintaining a changeable World to be Eternal ; and on the Absurdity of holding, that a World full of Order, Design, and Proportion, should spring from Chance or Fortune ; did teach, that God was the Soul, which did actuate the Chaos or great Heap of confused Matter which was Eternal, and did form and contrive artfully the World out of it. But to make any thing, besides God, self-existent, is repugnant to clear Reason, and will not consist with his infinite Per-

Perfection, which cannot allow any Being to exist independent of it.

But now the Account of the Original of Things in the Holy Writers, suits exactly with the Nature of God, and the State and Condition of the World.

There it is perpetually declared, that there is but one Supreme, self-existent Being; and that all other things whatsoever, did and must of necessity proceed from him; it being demonstrable by Reason, that the supposition of two Infinite, Almighty, Self-existent, Independent Beings, does imply a Contradiction; And all the Parts of the World carry unquestionable Evidence along with them, of their being the Productions of unbounded Wisdom, Goodness and Power.

Of these great Truths, which the greatest Philosophers spoke doubtfully of, how certain and express, and agreeable to themselves, are the inspired Writers from the beginning to the end of the Bible? They not only ascribe the Creation of the World to God alone, but set forth the Time and Order in which God made it. *He stretched forth the Heavens alone, and he spread abroad the earth by himself; he compassed the water with bounds, he made Man in his own image, and gave him dominion over other Creatures.*

And who could speak so excellently of God, and of his Works; of the Manner, Time, and Order of the Creation; but those who were instructed and assisted by the Spirit of God himself!

Further,

Further; whereas the Pagans make very defective Reports of Divine Providence, our Blessed Master Christ and his Followers, give us full Assurance, that the Providence of God extends it self to the whole World which he has made.

So that nothing can come to pass without his Knowledge; nothing can be acted without his Observation; and nothing can prosper without his Blessing. Whatever is done, he either orders, or at least permits it.

The greatest Portions of the World cannot subsist without his Conservation, and he will take the least under his Protection: The most Powerful stand in need of his care, and the Lowest shall not want it.

He provides for the Oxen, and the Sparrows, and the Lillies of the Field; but his Providence is more particularly employ'd about Men, and still more especially it is engaged for virtuous and holy Men, who sincerely serve him; it making all Accidents and Revolutions to work together for their Good.

(3.) The Inspired Writers discover to Mankind more plain and certain Rules and Ways of attaining true Happiness.

Among Pagan Authors there be stiff Disputes, wherein Happiness does consist; and they that do not agree about the Thing it self, must differ and contend more about the Means of attaining it.

It is granted, there are many true Notions and wise Precepts laid down in these Authors
about

about Happiness, and especially in those who have writ since the appearance of our Blessed Saviour: But as they wanted the Power of Miracles to convince Opposers that they received their Doctrine from Heaven; so in other respects they could not pretend to that Authority which our Saviour had, to make their Doctrine obtain in the World.

For with their sound and wholesome Rules of Virtue, they mingled Opinions improbable and untrue, which must discredit the whole, and weaken the Authority of the Writer.

Thus the same Men who writ so skilfully of Moral Philosophy, condemn'd the Passions as Evil, and made it our Duty to extinguish and destroy them.

And yet the Passions, contain'd within the Bounds of Moderation, and exercised about proper Objects, are of excellent Use; they protect our Virtue, and put us on our Guard when Temptations solicit us: They excite a just abhorrency of all Prophaneness and Immorality, and cause a wise Zeal in Men for the Honour of God, and the Happiness and Welfare of their Fellow-Creatures.

Besides, it is impossible to free our selves from Passions, which God hath interwoven with our Nature; and which, while we continue, cannot be rooted up.

The same Sect also had the Vanity to pretend, that Pains, and Sicknefs, and Torments, were no Evils. But Mankind will never embrace Opinions contrary to common Sense; and such weak
and

and unreasonable Assertions, could not but expose their Authors to general Contempt.

But further, the Lives of these Philosophers did not come up to their vain Principles; what seem'd so glorious in the Theory, they found too difficult in their Practice. Some among them of high Character, and the chief Founders and Patrons of rational Religion, were noted for Covetousness; others destitute of Patience to bear the Troubles in which they were involved, did Murder themselves; and others died meanly and abjectly, void of that Philosophick Courage and Bravery, of which they boasted to be great Masters.

On the contrary, our Lord gave Authority and Reputation to his Doctrine, by his miraculous Deeds; wrought not out of Ostentation, but to reclaim Men from Sin and Folly, and to heal their bodily Infirmities: He made his Precepts appear just and reasonable, by living suitably to them all himself.

And in the Cruelties that immediately preceded his Death, and in his Death, he afforded the most perfect Example of Piety and suffering Virtue, that ever was seen in the World. He shewed the greatest Patience in his Person: being led to slaughter, like a Lamb, he opened not his Mouth; no Repinings, tho' he died unjustly, were uttered by him with respect to them who slew him; but he manifested the highest Charity to Men, pardoning his Destroyers, and praying his Father to forgive their Sin; and with a Prayer, that the Will of God, not his own Will,

Will, might be done, he meekly yielded to the Stroke of Death. And by rising on the Third Day from the Dead, he gave the fullest Proof of the Truth of his Religion, and the firmest Hope of future Life, that reasonable Men could desire.

Wherefore, if Men of Wit would lay aside their Prejudices, Reason would compel them to confess, that the heavenly Doctrines and Laws of Christ established by numerous Miracles, his compleatly Holy and pure Life, his Meekness, Charity, and entire Submission to the Will of God in his Death, and his wonderful Resurrection from the State of the Dead, are most unquestionable Evidences of the Divinity of his Person, of the Truth of his Gospel, and of the Obligation upon us thankfully to accept him for our Redeemer and Saviour, upon the gracious Terms he has proposed.

For if you would enquire by what Authority your Religion was set up, could you have a greater than the Power of God working Miracles to establish it?

Or could you have a better Recommendation of the Doctrines and Duties thereof, than their Agreeableness to your clearest and most impartial Reason?

But before I dismiss this Head, it may be material to observe, that the Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour as bearing the Image of God; which be the Sum and Substance of the Christian Religion, and the truest Comforts and Supports to the Soul of Man in all States and

Condi-

Conditions; are never mentioned, recommended, or required in the *Pagan* Theology.

They never enjoin Men to love God, as the first and chief Cause of their Happiness; nor to love their Neighbour, because he bore the Divine Image; and that their kindness shewed to him, God would interpret to be done to himself.

Not being so fully perswaded, that God Created the World; they were not so sensible, that they owed themselves, and all they have, to him.

Not being so assured of God's Universal and perpetual Providence; they did not, in the constant Course of their Lives, so entirely depend upon his Care and Protection.

And tho' some of 'em thought it generous to forgive Injuries, yet we never find them enjoin the doing Good for Evil, and praying Pardon for those who persecute them.

It will then be plain, that neither the fabulous Religion invented by Poets, nor the Civil Rights enacted by Law-givers, nor Natural Rights as asserted and explained by Philosophers, can be compared with the Religion and Knowledge of Jesus Christ Crucified.

(4.) The Holy Writers give Men greater assurance, that God will forgive the Sins of them that truly Repent, and accept their sincere Faith and Obedience.

There is greater Encouragement in Scripture to hope God will Pardon Sin upon Repentance, than Men had Ground from Reason to expect,

and which therefore by Reason they could never discover.

When they had misused the Abilities, which God had given them to set forth his Honour, and to do good to others; reason would convince them, that they deserved Punishment; but it could not secure a Pardon to them, tho' they did Repent.

The Perswasions to Honesty and Virtue in Heathen Writers, are many; the Exhortations to ill Men to seek of God the forgiveness of their Crimes by Reformation, but very few.

But what is delivered so imperfectly by them that had only Natural Light to Guide them, is made plain, and clear, and full, by those who Writ with the Assistance of the Spirit of God.

How comfortable must it be to hear, that God is in a perpetual readiness to receive Sinners upon their leaving their Evil Courses; and that he will Pardon the most notorious Crimes upon the sincere Amendment of the Offenders! he not thinking the greatest Sins too big for his Mercy, and being pleased to make the most profligate Wretches the Objects of his Pity. *When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his Soul Alive, Ezekiel 18. 27. And tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; tho' they be red like Crimson, they shall be as Wooll, Isaiah 1. 18. He that believeth, shall be saved: Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, Acts 3. 19.*

Indeed

Indeed the whole Dispensation of the Gospel, was the merciful Contrivance of God for the Pardon of Sin. Christ brought a Commission from Heaven to grant forgiveness to all those, who should unfeignedly Repent, and believe his Holy Gospel. Which he sealed and made valid by his Death, and evidenced it to be true by his Resurrection. *It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third Day, that Repentance and remission of Sins should be preached in his Name, among all Nations,* Luke 24. 46, 47. *They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and they shall Mourn,* Zach. 12. 10. *Him hath God exalted, (raised from the Dead) for to give Repentance,* Acts 5. 31.

But we may observe the Wisdom and Mercy of God to be such in ordering the Redemption of Mankind, that, first, he asserted the Honour and Justice of his Laws : and, Secondly, he manifested the utter Detestation and Abhorrence his Holy Nature has of all Wickedness ; and, Lastly, that it is certain, Men have no Ground in the Gospel given them to hope for Salvation, but upon Repentance and forsaking their Sins.

As to the *Gentiles*, who never knew of the Promise of Pardon of Sin to all true Penitents revealed in Scripture, the Lord will Judge them by the Measures of Knowledge and Assistance which he furnished them with ; and we leave them to the uncovenanted Mercies, and to the immense goodness of God, which leads Men to Repentance.

(5.) The Scripture promises more Assistance to Men in performing their Religious Duty.

There was not a greater Error in *Pagan* Philosophy, than to fancy a Man could make himself Happy; nor a prophaner Vanity, than to equal their Wise Man to the Gods.

Nothing could be said more contrary to their own Experience of Wants and Infirmities: nor more misbecoming the Divine Perfections, which they might discover by the Light of Nature.

This Wise Man of theirs, is often instructed to employ a great part of his Time in getting the Art to Contemn, or at least not to fear Death. But what Endeavours can be possible to rid a Man of the Fears and Terror of Death, who has no Notion or Hope of any Happiness beyond it! For the Thought of that which will entirely deprive a Man of all his Felicity and Comfort, must unavoidably be dreadful.

But such endeavours indeed in Christians are very just and reasonable, who hope for much better Things in another Life.

Also the Scriptures alone set forth the Fall and Misery of Man, and his Redemption by the Death of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Ghost to enable him to fulfil the Terms of the New Covenant God had made with him.

It is the Office of this Holy Spirit to Guide Christians into all Truth necessary to be known, and to give them Strength and Resolution to perform all Duties required to be done, in order to their Salvation. This blessed Spirit is present in all Places, and ever ready to exert its Power in
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aiding and giving Life to all the Members of Christ's Body. He makes Holy designs to spring up in our Minds, and does store us with prevailing Motives to pursue them.

This most Holy Spirit fits himself to all the Exigencies of the Saints. Where doubts on both sides make it hard to resolve, he lets in Light upon the sincere Mind to direct it; where Things of great Danger are to be undertaken, he inspires Courage to encounter them; where sharp Affliction comes, he ministers Patience to bear them.

When Lusts tempt Men, he puts them in Mind that the most glorious God is present, who is of too pure Eyes to behold Uncleanness. If secular Authority and Power presses upon their Consciences, he suggests that God is more Potent than Man; and that he within them, is greater than he that is in the World; At last, if they are forced to die for their Holy Religion, he brings to their Remembrance the Comfortable and Gracious Promise of Christ, that he that lays down his Life for his Sake, shall save his Soul; and that for the loss of this short Life, he shall receive an Eternity of Joy and Peace.

Nothing but not thinking, or want of Observation, or Minds enslaved to sensual Pleasure, could have disposed Some to reproach the Christian Religion, (supported with such Divine Assistance) for not having made a more visible Alteration in the Morals of Men. For more Works of Benevolence and Charity have been done, to remove the Ignorance, and to relieve the Wants, and to ease the Miseries of Mankind;

more Persons have quitted their whole worldly Interest ; more have submitted to Torments and Death, to preserve themselves pure from the Guilt of Idolatry, and to bear Testimony to the Truth and Power of the Gospel ; than for natural Religion, or for any, or all other Religions instituted in any Time, or any part of the World.

Further, there seems great Presumption in Those Mens Cavil, who would question the Operations of the Spirit, because they cannot perceive the manner of them ; for if a Man cannot shew the Way how his own Soul does Work upon his Body, shall it seem strange unto him that he does not understand and discern the manner how the Spirit of God acts upon and influences his Soul, whose Ways are all unsearchable and past our finding out?

God would not have given us Help, which had been unnecessary ; the Holy Ghost would not have come to us ; if we could have resisted the World, the Flesh, and the Devil without him.

Who then art thou, O Man, who thus dost presume to make Reflections on the Proceedings of God ? It is more fit to Adore and Praise That God, who sent his only Son to give us Everlasting Life ; to Love and Honour that Son, who died for the Remission of our Sin, and diligently to regard, and carefully to attend all the gracious Suggestions and Motions of the Holy Spirit, who would Guide our Feet in the Paths of Eternal Happiness.

(6.) We

(6.) We find in Scripture a fuller and clearer Account of the Immortality of the Soul, and of the Rewards and Punishments in the future State.

No Laws of any Country, no Religion of any Nation, no Set of Philosophers did expressly teach, or positively assert the Immortality of the Soul, and the Resurrection of the Body, and that Men should Account for all the Actions of this Life, and receive Rewards or Punishments proportionable to them; tho' they had some glimmering Light about these Things.

Abraham, assisted by the Spirit, had a firm Perswasion of the Resurrection; so that, contrary to the strongest Inclinations of Nature, he would have sacrificed his own Son, believing God was able to raise him from the Dead.

Many of the Prophets did particularly foretell, and *Jonah* did typify the Resurrection of Christ, by being three Days and three Nights in the Belly of the Fish; and our Lord plainly declared of himself, that he should Die, and rise the Third Day; albeit at that time the Disciples were not prepared rightly to apprehend him. But this Fundamental Article, and Support of our Christian Faith, did not not thoroughly obtain until Christ was Risen.

Our Saviour, sensible of the unreasonable infidelity that the Lusts of Men would betray them to, has left uncontestable Evidence of these great Truths.

For by raising Men from the Dead before his own Death, and after it ; by raising himself to Life, and with him a great Number of Saints out of their Graves, who were seen of many ; and after his glorious Ascension which was beheld of many Witnesses, by sending the Holy Ghost the Comforter, who did infuse such Miraculous Abilities into his Disciples, Apostles, and other Followers, that even They could and did bring dead Men to Life again : By these Miracles, so particularly adapted to destroy Unbelief, our Saviour demonstrated the possibility of our Resurrection ; as the whole design of his coming among us, does prove the necessity of it.

After so full an Evidence, may we not say ; why should the Resurrection in particular, or the Religion of Christ in the general, seem doubtful ?

The *Jews*, who must be guilty of Murder if Christ was an Innocent Person, and be unpardonable Blasphemers if he was the Son of God, could in no instance prove his Miracles Frauds, or himself an Impostor ; Tho' it was their Interest so much to overthrow the Credit of his wonderful Works, yet they had not the Confidence to deny the Truth of them.

Neither have the prophane Wits, and Patrons of Immorality, been ever since able to detect any Thing deserving Censure in his Life, Doctrine, or Miracles, as not worthy of the Divine Nature, or repugnant to the Reason and Sense of Mankind.

Never

Never any Religion made its Entry so easily into the Word, tho' they who set it up, had neither Learning to dispute for it, nor Swords to fight for it : Never any Religion took deeper Root in less Time, nor settled it self so firmly, notwithstanding zealous *Jews* and eloquent *Gentiles* would have expelled it as Dangerous, or exposed it as Contemptible ; and the Supreme Powers also made Laws against it, and put the Professors of it to Death.

But this pure Religion did bear down all kinds of Opposition, by the Truth of its Doctrines, by the Holiness of its Converts, and was at length firmly established in the Blood of the Martyrs.

To conclude ;

May we then all walk worthy of our Holy Profession in Christ, and answer the ends of his Incarnation. May we diligently imitate the Virtues of his Life, and abhor the Sins for which he died. May the Consideration of his Death and Resurrection, mortify and destroy in us all Evil Concupiscence and ungodly Lust, and open to us the gate of everlasting Life. May the God of Patience enable us to suffer the greatest Afflictions rather than lose a good Conscience, and make Shipwreck of the Faith. May the God of Consolation enable us to endure all Labour and Weariness in running to the end of our Christian Race ; and being risen with Christ from the Death of Sin, to seek those Things which are above. May the God of Hope teach us to resist all
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the Temptations to unlawful Pleasure, which now beset and press upon us; that preserving our selves Pure and Innocent, we may at Christ's second coming receive the Crown of Righteousness laid up for all those that Serve, Fear, and Honour him, and Love his appearing. *Which God of his infinite Mercy Grant.*

May we then all walk worthy of our holy
 protection to Christ, and answer the end of his in-
 vitation. May we diligently imitate the Vir-
 tues of his life, and shun the sins for which
 he died. May the consideration of his death
 and resurrection, mortify and destroy in us all
 evil concupiscences and ungodly lusts, and open
 to us the gate of everlasting life. May the God
 of patience enable us to suffer the greatest Af-
 flictions rather than lose a good Conscience, and
 the righteousness of the Faith. May the God of
 consolation enable us to endure all labour, and
 weariness in running to the end of our Christian
 race, and being risen with Christ from the
 death of sin, to seek those things which are
 above. May the God of Hope teach us to rest all
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SERMON XIV.

ACTS X. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

THESE Words are the Declaration of St. Peter to Cornelius an Officer, who Commanded a Party in the Roman Army, sent to keep the Jews under subjection to the Emperor who had lately conquer'd them.

Cornelius was a Man of singular Piety and Virtue, carefully discharging his Duty to God and Man: He constantly worshipp'd the Lord with his whole Family, and prepared himself for his daily Devotions by Fasting and giving of Alms, which are the Messengers that raise up and speedily convey

convey the Prayers of good Men to Heaven, and make them acceptable when they come thither.

God had regard to the exemplary Goodness and Probity of *Cornelius*; he heard his Prayers, and, in recompence of his great Bounty and Charity to the People, he was pleased to make him the first Fruits of the *Gentiles*; for he was the first of the Uncircumcision that was admitted into the Christian Church, being first baptized into the Name and Faith of Christ, and having first received the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

A double Miracle was done to enlarge and open the Kingdom of Heaven to all true Believers, of what Race or Nation soever they were.

For upon adding this first *Gentile* to the Church, God used the extraordinary Ministry both of an Angel and an Apostle: An Angel appears to *Cornelius*, and shews him where he should find the Apostle; and the Apostle, miraculously taught in a Vision, that *the Gentiles were to make part of Christ's Flock*, does discover to him the Means of Salvation contained in the Gospel.

And the Wisdom of God did so order and contrive, that the same Miracles, which mutually convinced *St. Peter* and *Cornelius*; the one, that he might lawfully reveal the Laws of the Gospel to a *Gentile*; and the other, that he ought to believe what he heard, as Truths necessary to his future Happiness: were to be likewise of great Benefit and Use to the rest of the Apostles, as a standing and durable Evidence, that God made no distinction between the People of different Blood

Blood and Countries, but would treat All with equal Justice and Mercy, according to their doings; and that they were to preach Faith and Repentance to all Nations, and endeavour to make them Members of the Church of Christ, the pale whereof should be as large as the bounds of the Earth; according to the Prediction of Holy David; *All the ends of the World shall remember themselves, and be turned unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him, Psal. 22. 27.*

Now when St. Peter plainly understood it was the Will of God, that the Gospel should be revealed to all People, without Exception of the Place or Quality of Persons; and did consider the great Goodness of God to *Cornelius*, who had honour'd and serv'd him uprightly and sincerely according to the measure of his imperfect Knowledge, in sending an Angel on purpose to him, tho' he was no Branch of the House of *Israel*, more fully to instruct him in the true Religion; *He open'd his mouth and said, i. e. he made a solemn and open Declaration of this great Truth, by the Apostles and Ministers of Christ in all Times to be observed, that God was no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

The First thing I shall propose, is to give some account of this declaration St. Peter made of the Nature of God, so comfortable to good and honest Men, but which must terrify the wicked; *that God is no respecter of persons.* Which I shall explain and clear by answering some Objections to

to it. Now Two Objections may be raised, taken from God's dealing with the Children of Men, recorded in the Scripture.

(1.) To do unequally by Persons in like or equal Circumstances, that is, to shew greater kindness to some than to others, where there Merits are equal, and one deserves no more than another; is to *respect persons*.

(2.) Or to do alike or equally to Persons not in like or equal Circumstances, that is, to shew the same kindness to Persons where their Merits are not the same, but unequal, or some do deserve more than others; is also to *respect persons*.

Thus according to the *first* Objection, God in preferring the *Hebrews* above all other Nations, who yet were in the same Circumstances of Nature, and had an equal Stock of Merit with them; did shew *respect of persons*.

The *second* Objection we find in the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, where the Order was to give the same Wages to them who had worked but one Hour, as to those who had laboured all the Day; that is, to distribute an equal recompence among all, where some of 'em had deserved ten times as much as others.

To make clear these seeming difficulties, we are to distinguish between what is strict Right and Justice, and what is free Gift and pure Favour. God always exactly observes the first, and, in the other, acts according to his Wisdom.

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It is a notion most agreeable to common Sense, that Gifts are free, and that the Giver may dispose of them as he shall think most fit. Wherefore God could not be obliged to give to all equally, where nothing of what he gave was due: The *Gentiles* who had least, had more than they did deserve, or could lay claim to.

As to the labourers of the Vineyard, they who worked all the Day, had Right and Justice done them: For the Bargain they made was performed, and they received the full Reward of their Labour for which they contracted. And God's singular liberality to some, cannot with Reason be accused, while he is just to all; and even the greatest Complainers have much cause to acknowledge his Mercy. But I observe further, that this Parable is not so much to be apply'd to single Persons, or to be understood of God's accepting the late Repentance of particular Men, as of the Calling of the *Gentiles*.

The Posterity of *Abraham* for many Ages had been the chosen People of God, and were under the more peculiar Care and Direction of his Providence; but when he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the World to preach the Laws of Eternal Righteousness, the Wall of Partition between them and other Nations was taken down, and to the *Gentiles* God granted Repentance unto Life; and made them capable of partaking of all the same Blessings and Advantages of the Gospel with the *Jews*, the People who had so long retained to him.

This

This is yet more evident, from what the Lord declares in the same Parable; *the last shall be first, and the first shall be last*; That is, the Gentiles, tho' last called, being humble, and free from Pride and Prejudices, should embrace the Religion of Christ; when the *Israelites*, who had been first in God's Favour, thro' their haughtiness, obstinacy, and hardness of Heart, should despise the Son of God, and reject the tenders of Salvation offer'd by him, who, with great Compassion to their Distress, would *have gathered them as a Hen gathers her Chickens under her wings, but they would not*.

But we ought further to observe, that God's being no *respector of persons*, does not imply, that God should give to all Men, equal Wit and Understanding of Mind, or equal Strength and Agility of Body, or equal Honour, and Riches, and Power; or that all Men should be enabled to attain to the same degrees of Knowledge of the Divine Nature and Attributes; or as clear Notions of their Religious Duty, or like Abilities and Opportunities to do good: Since this inequality in a great measure, depends first upon the Affections, Honesty, Care and Skill of Parents, Governors, and Masters, who hardly ever do exactly alike in their Carriage to those who come from them, or depend upon them; and then upon the Care, Wisdom, and Diligence of Men in their own Behaviour; and upon their Places, Callings, and Circumstances in the present State, where some must govern, others obey; some command, and others comply; some thrive, and others fall

to decay; so that the Condition and State of the World makes a variety of Faculties, Parts, Powers, and Abilities among Men unavoidable, unless God should new make the World, or be constantly interrupting the natural Order of Things; which is most absurd to suppose, and would much reflect upon the Divine Wisdom in the Creation and Government of the World.

But if hardly any are found enjoying equality of inward Endowments, and of outward Circumstances; in *what* sense are we to understand God to be *no respecter of persons*?

I answer, that God's having *no respect of persons*, does not consist in his giving an equal number of good Things to all Men at first; but when he shall proceed to Judgment, in requiring an account of every Man in proportion only to what he had received. For as no Attribute of God did oblige him to make all his Creatures of one Rank and Condition; but it was consistent with his Holy Nature, to create several Degrees of Beings, some with much greater Perfections than others; so neither could God be engaged to make all the Creatures of the same Rank and Order equal in every respect, or to furnish them with the same Powers and Abilities; in which, as I have proved, without a Miracle they could not long continue.

But the Equity of the Divine Proceedings will appear in God's treatment of every Man at last, according to the Measure of good Things he did bestow on him.

God then has no *respect of persons*, principally with regard to the final Judgment or Sentence he will pass on all Men: For to have *respect of persons*, is a Phrase of Speech used with relation to Judges; who when they judge for, or against a Man, upon Considerations foreign to the Merits and Reason of the Cause, are said to have *respect of persons*.

When Greatness, or Interest, or Friendship, or Gifts, or Enmity, do make them to condemn the Innocent, or acquit the Guilty; then they proceed according to the Character and Quality of the Person, and not the Justice and Equity of the Case.

But when God shall sit in Judgment, he will have no regard to the Appearance of Persons: This Almighty Wise Judge cannot be aw'd by Greatness, deceiv'd by Eloquence, corrupted by Presents, or sway'd by any outward Motives and Considerations: He will pronounce a Sentence according to the Knowledge Men had of his Nature and Will, and the Abilities and Opportunities given to perform the Duties he requir'd of them.

He that had but a single Talent, shall only account for that; and God will be far from expecting of Him the Improvement of five Talents, who was trusted but with two.

Therefore the poor and ignorant Pagans, who were not of the Seed of *Abraham*, and never heard of the Lord Jesus, shall only be answerable for such Duties, as they did learn by the light of Nature.

But

But those who have been bred in the Knowledge of Christ and his Holy Religion, but yet have given up and sold themselves to do Wickedness, have practised and encouraged Prophane-ness and Immorality; they shall be condemned to suffer many Stripes.

Thus where Men are in a low Condition, and without any to instruct them, or time to learn the truest Notions of God, and the exactest measures of their Duty; God will allow both for the Errors of their Faith, and the Frailties of their Practice, if according to the Light and Ability they had, they did honestly and sincerely.

So true is it, that *in every nation be that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

In treating further on which words, we may observe,

(1.) Here is supposed the Belief of a God in every Nation.

(2.) That the Belief of God disposes Men to Fear and Reverence him.

(3.) That Piety and Righteousness are the chief Qualifications to make Men acceptable to God.

(1.) Here is supposed the Belief of a God in every Nation. The Belief of God has been received in all Countries; they that differ widely in other Opinions, have all agreed in this, that there is a God. And this Belief of a Deity hath been as ancient, as it is universal. For as there

is no Kingdom, so there is no Age wherein they have not acknowledged a God.

And every where, the more Virtue and Learning Men have had, and have more deeply contemplated the Nature of Things, and of Themselves; so much more fully have they been convinced of the Divine Existence, and more strongly proved it to others. Infomuch that Antiquity, and Universality, and Learning, and Virtue, and Consideration, have been on the side of God.

Some indeed of late time, have reported, that there are in some few places savage and barbarous People, among whom there is none, or but little appearance of Religion.

But these Writers are confuted by others since, who have made more narrow and accurate search. They assure us, those poor Savages do worship God, tho' not in a way suitable to his Nature, yet in some proportion to the Fragments of Sense and Understanding still remaining with them.

And it is no great wonder, where Reason is very low, that Religion should dwindle; and when the Light of Nature is very faint and dim, that they should stray far from the ways of Godliness and Honesty.

Now a universal consent of all Nations, conveyed thro' all the Periods of Time down to our days, must be the voice of Nature, testifying the Author of it, and pointing out the first Cause, necessarily Existing of it self, which gave to all things Life and Being.

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The few Pretenders to Atheism, who have offer'd at an Account of the World without a God, have made nothing of it. Tho' they have been Men of great Wit, yet in this Undertaking they have bungled shamefully; and made out only, that they themselves were egregious Tri-
flers.

Ask an *Epicurean*, of the Frame of this great World, of the Beauty, Motion, and Order among the Heavenly Bodies, and of the great variety of Creatures in the Earth and Sea, and the proper Supplies of Food for them all; or enquire concerning the Structure of his own Body, wherein be a vast number of Parts, differing in Size, Figure, and Quality, curiously wrought, nicely joined together, exactly situated in place and distance from one another, suitable to perform their peculiar Offices; and these all so skilfully combined, as to preserve and support each other, and to serve the several uses of Life:

The *Epicurean*, I say, must ascribe to mere Chance this excellent Work, in which such noble Design and exquisite Contrivance does appear.

But if you allow one Body to be by Chance; yet can Thousands and Millions of Bodies, exceeding beyond all comparison the Art of Man, be made by a casual jumbling of the Parts of Matter together?

Is it not more easy for a rational Man to believe all the Ridiculous Fables that ever were in any Legend or Romance, than to think that all
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the admirable beings in the World were brought forth by Fortune or Chance ?

We may desire to know ; what can be more repugnant to the Sense, Reason, and Experience of Men, than these most absurd Doctrines which the Atheists are constrained to maintain ?

Neither do They mend the Matter, or expose themselves to less Difficulties, who in the room of Chance would introduce Fate giving Being and Laws to Things ; unless by Fate they mean an intelligent wise Being.

For ascribe the Being and Order of Things whether to Chance or Fate, it will be utterly unaccountable how there should be in the World infinite Numbers of most artful Productions, wise Designs, rational Contrivances, without Knowledge, Reason, Wisdom, and Art in the Cause which did produce them.

But others, observing how extremely weak all these Pretences for Atheism are, would maintain the World to have been from Eternity. But now to affirm the World Eternal, is to affirm, that by wonderful Knowledge, Wisdom, and Skill, Things Eternally have been made and preserved. For there must, from the Beauty, and Order, and Harmony of the World, have been the same Arguments for the existence of God in the times that are past, as in the present.

I say, in every one of the numberless Ages past, there was as much Proof of the Necessity of an Omnipotent all-knowing and immensely wise Cause, as there is in the Time present. For Time is but a Circumstance which does not alter

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or abate the Edge and Force of the Argument, viz. that incomparable Contrivance, admirable Design and Skill in the effect, must demonstrate incomparable Wisdom, Knowledge, and Power in the Cause that gave it Birth: It being an undoubted Maxim of Reason, that there can be no excellency in the Effect, which is not actually or potentially in the Cause.

I shall not here urge the Argument against the Eternity of the World, with which Learned Men believe they have proved it absurd and impossible; it appearing to them a Contradiction, that there should be infinite Succession of Ages, or, which is the same Thing, a Succession without a beginning, that is, a Third, a Fourth, a Fifth, without a Second and a First:

But that which I propose, is: it will be evidently manifest to whosoever shall consider it, that something of necessity should be Eternal; and that we cannot alter or destroy our Idea or Conception of its Eternity; because we cannot conceive that this vast World should spring from nothing, without a Cause.

But what was necessarily from Eternity, must be self-existent, and likewise infinite, there being nothing besides to limit or set bounds to it.

Now what exists of it self, and is necessarily Eternal and Infinite, must by unavoidable Consequence have Almighty Power, boundless Knowledge, immense Wisdom, and all other Perfections, the Effects and Marks whereof do brightly appear in the Creating, Government, and Preservation of the World.

But we further take Notice, that as we cannot avoid, or obliterate the Conception or Idea of an Eternal, Infinite, Self-existent Being; so it implies a Contradiction to have an Idea of two Self-existing, Independent, Eternal, and Infinite Beings; for their Existence is Repugnant, and they would mutually destroy one another: So that the Existence of One Being from Eternity is necessary, and the Existence of more than one is impossible.

We find the Eternity and Infinity of God with great plainness exprest in Holy Scripture. His Eternity; *Before the Mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the Earth and the World: even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God, Psalm 90. 2.* His Infinity; *But will God indeed dwell on Earth? behold, the Heaven and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee, how much less the House that I have builded? 1 Kings 8. 27.* But from David, who writ what the Holy Spirit revealed, we learn, that the Lord looks down from Heaven, beholds all the Children of Men, fashioneth their Hearts, and Understands all their Works. That his Eye is on them that fear him, and upon them that put their Trust in his Mercy, Psalm 31. 13, 14, 17.

(2.) That the belief of God does dispose Men to Fear and Reverence him. *Epicurus* Taught there were Gods; but said, they did not Mind what was done in the World, or take any Care thereof. Which was, as *Tully* judiciously Observes, to assert the Gods in Name, but to deny them

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in Reality : And in so foolish a Doctrine he had but a few Followers :

Because the Notion of God, does infer Power over all Things ; and where the Fountain of Power is, thither Natural Instinct teaches Men to direct their Fears and Reverence.

Thoughtful Men cannot but have an awful regard of that Mighty Being, which can both Preserve and Destroy them ; and study, by pleasing Carriage, to win his Favour and Esteem.

But when moreover we look on God in the quality and title of a Creator, this will excite in our Souls Gratitude and Thankfulness, which we best express by acts of Praise and Adoration.

How can we imploy our Meditation on God in the relation of a Father, of whom we received our Life and Being ; and not believe that he loves the Work of his own Hands ? And if we believe that God Loves us his Creatures, will not it dispose us to have our principal Dependance on him, and to lay before him both our Wants and our Dangers ; that he may furnish us with the good Things whereof we stand in need, and defend and protect us against the Evils we justly Fear.

And of this Piety and Devotion we discover plain Foot-steps in the *Pagan* part of the World. The *Pagans* did address themselves to their Gods in all great Events, and the considerable Affairs of Life. They did solemnly put up their Prayers for seasonable Weather, when they sowed their Seed and planted their Vines ; and they did Sacrifice the fattest of their Flocks, when

when their Cattle brought forth Young ; they made an offering of their finest Wheat and sweetest Wines, at the Times they reaped their Corn, and gathered their Grapes.

Neither did they make War or Peace without going to the Oracle to consult their Deities ; nor did the Soldiers engage in Battel, nor Merchants go to Sea, without imploring the Aid and Blessing of their Gods : And after a Victory won, or the making a Safe and Prosperous Voyage, they were constant in rendring costly Testimonies of their Thankfulness to the God of Heaven.

This was the State of Religion, especially among the more civilized Nations, but mingled with much Idolatry and Superstition. Their Mistakes were Gross and Many, both about the Divine Nature, and the Manner and Kinds of their Religious Worship.

But our Saviour coming into the World, did not only, by his Miracles, or Supernatural Works, give further Evidence of the Being God ; but displayed his Glorious Nature, and rectified the great and prevailing Errors about it, and did restore the true Worship of him to its Original Purity.

To encourage us to a constant habitual Reliance on God in the Course of our Lives, he teaches us that God does always observe and watch over the Works of his Creation ; that his Providence does not only govern and rule the greater Portions of the World, but his Care does extend it self to the smallest Things : That he Cloths the Lilies of the Field, regards the Spar-

rows, and has even the Hairs of our Head in Number.

That Men of Evil Lives might not despair of Reconciliation with God, he assures them of the Remission of Sins by his own Blood; and that God will Pardon all those, who sincerely Repent, and unfeignedly Believe in Christ: Of which the *Gentiles*, by the corrupted Light of Nature, could not be absolutely certain. And that we may bear patiently the Injuries and Hardships which we suffer for God, and by firmly adhering to his Holy Religion; he declares the Immortality of our Souls, and in Recompence of what we shall lose, or endure in his Cause, does promise we shall receive an hundredfold in the Kingdom of Heaven. *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, and that thou hast prepared for them that put their trust in thee, even before the Sons of Men!* Psalm 31. 19. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,* 2 Tim. 4. 8.

(3.) That Piety and Righteousness are the Chief Qualifications to make Men acceptable to God. Piety implies That Fear, Reverence, and Love of God, which makes us keep his Commandments; and Governs our Thoughts, Words, and Actions thro' the Course of our Lives. Righteousness not only preserves Justice and Honesty in our Dealings, but disposes us to be
kind

kind and affectionate to our Fellow-Creatures, and to do good, and shew Mercy according to our Power, and as we have Opportunity.

The high rate God sets upon Piety and Righteousness, will appear from such Considerations as follow. As, first, that all the other Commandments were given for the sake of these.

All the positive Divine Laws are enacted for to advance Godliness and Honesty in the World, And where they do not promote Holiness and Goodness, they of themselves are of no Value; and when they prove an Hindrance or Impediment to these heavenly Dispositions of Mind, their Obligation ceases, and the reason of their Institution is at an end.

The drawing near to God with their Lips, and their Offering costly Sacrifices, made him abhor the *Jews*, while, under such an hypocritical shew, their Hearts were estranged from him.

Again; where the Defects of Religion are reckoned up, you will easily perceive the Defect and Absence of true Piety and solid Virtue unpardonable. The Righteousness of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* God would not in any wise accept, because it consisted only in an outward Conformity to *Moses's* Law, without purifying their Hearts, or governing their Affections and Desires.

For their Pompous Sacrifices, and long Prayers, did not hinder them from devouring Widows Houses, and robbing of the Orphans.

We further Learn from our Saviour, if Men are punctual in performing the publick Offices of Religion, and also avoid notorious Sins, but yet

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do no Good, that even They are in a desperate Case. *For every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruit, shall be hewen down.*

Many will say, Lord, Lord, we have professed in thy Name, i. e. we have openly professed thy Religion. But he will reject them, because when they heard his Word, they did not do it. No Man therefore ought to think his Soul safe in the bare Profession of the best Religion, if he does not practise it and Live up to what he Believes.

When, moreover, God contracts the Laws and Duties of Religion, as it were, into one Sum; there, Holiness and Righteousness are expressly set down. What does the Lord our God, says the Prophet, require of us, *but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with the Lord our God?*

When our Saviour abridged the Divine Laws, he reduced them to these two, *The Loving God with all their Heart and Power, and the loving our Neighbour as our selves.* And when the Young Man enquired what were the Means of Salvation, our Lord told him, the Way to enter into Life Eternal, was to keep the Commandments.

When our Saviour gives the Character of true Friendship, and the Marks of unfeigned Love of him, he resolves them into Obedience to his Holy and Righteous Will. If we profess our selves his Friends, we are engaged to do whatsoever he Commands us; if we Love him, we must keep his Commandments.

Further;

Further; Piety and Righteousness are made indispensable Conditions of future Happiness: without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord. And for refusing to Feed the Hungry, and Cloath the Naked, and Relieve the Distressed; wicked Men, called Goats, shall at the last Day of Judgment be set on the Left Hand of Christ, and hear that dreadful Sentence pass on them, *depart ye Cursed, &c.*

And St. Peter speaking of the great uncertainty of the Time when God will Judge the World, *that the day of the Lord will come like a Thief*, and of the Destruction of the World *to be by fire*; makes an inference highly to be regarded by all: *Seeing these things shall be dissolved, what manner of Persons ought we to be in all Holy Conversation and Godliness!*

(1.) Now to make some further Application of these weighty Considerations to our selves. If Godliness and Honesty are the only means of obtaining God's acceptance, let us trust to nothing less for our Salvation.

These excellent Duties and Qualities in our Souls, which God has so strictly enjoined, so highly commended, and so indispensibly required, do make us, in some Measure, resemble God; for 'tis by the Exercise of these Graces and Virtues, that we imitate the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, the Goodness, the Patience, the Mercy, and Long-suffering of God: So that they are not only the Terms of our Salvation, but they

fit

fit and prepare us to appear before God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus the beloved Disciple argues: He that hath this Hope; *i. e.* hopes to see God as he is in all his Glory and Perfection, *does purify himself even as he is pure, i. e.* hopes to become like unto God in those Attributes of his most blessed Nature, which his poor Creatures can imitate.

And if we would possess our Souls with a just Fear of God, and a True Love of Men, and endeavour to instruct our Family in Piety and Probity of Life, like good *Cornelius*; it would make us, in a Degree, to partake of the Joys and Pleasures of Heaven, while we have our Abode on Earth.

For it would keep up Justice, and Peace, and Beneficence, and Good-Will among Men. All Affairs, not only in private Families, but of publick Nature in Kingdoms, and between Nation and Nation, would with ease be managed, and hardly fall out of Order.

It would allay and subdue the Heats, Bitterness, Wrath, Injuries, and Cruelty, caused by Pride, Ambition, Lust, Covetousness, and Revenge, which now Divide, Confound, and Torment the World. And we should become exceeding Careful and Tender of each others Person, Estate, and Reputation, as being all Sons of God by Creation, and Brethren in Christ Jesus thro' Redemption by his Blood. Thus it is *most* Evident, that the Love and Fear of God will make Men most Happy, and that without true Religion no Man can have sincere Joy and Peace
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in any Condition : For where there is want of Religion, an uneasiness and desire of Change will attend every kind of Life.

Men in Honourable Stations and the Posts of Business, find so many things come cross them, are so grieved with perverse Opposition, and tired with unreasonable Suiters, that they often retire for Liberty and Quiet :

But in Retirement they presently become sensible of the want of that Conversation, which before was a burden : and are apt to grow heavy and melancholy.

If Men of private Life, and little Employment, be vicious, and do Wickedness in their privacy; they are forced to get abroad to avoid themselves, and to drown with Wine and Company the bitter reproaches and cries of Conscience, which alone they could not silence. Thus Satisfaction is to be had in no State without Religion.

But on the other side, if Persons of great Rank, and much Power, do manifest their esteem of God by their Words and Actions, and do support Piety, Justice, Mercy, and Temperance, they will gain a special Title to the Protection of God ; they will mend and improve the Condition of the World ; all Men will fear them, and the Good and Virtuous will deeply honour, love and respect them.

Wherefore, tho' a Man withdraw from the crowd, hoping for that Comfort and Solitude which he could not meet in Business ; unless he carry true Religion along with him, he will be much mistaken, and never find it :

But if after his Retreat, he loves and fears the Lord, and daily prays to him; if he instructs his Family in Godliness, and Honesty, and Sobriety; and gives Alms, according to his Ability, to his poor Neighbours; then he will perceive most pure and exalted Pleasure in his absence from the busy World; and the Conscience of the good he does, will furnish him with a perpetual Feast.

Now the Reason of these great Truths is plain and strong; because nothing but God himself can answer and satisfy the Appetites and vast Desires of our Immortal Souls; nor can we discover any stedfast Assurance of Safety and Happiness in depending on any thing, but the Divine Power and Assistance, promised to us, and purchased for us by the Merits of Jesus Christ: Insomuch that nothing can more quicken and exalt our Love and Reverence of God, than Meditations upon his unspeakable Goodness, in sending his only Son Jesus Christ from Heaven to dwell in our Flesh, and to take our mean Condition upon him.

That the Son of God should condescend to be born of a Woman, and be made liable to all the Troubles, Wants, and Infirmities of Men, Sin only excepted; that he might give us the wisest and best Precepts, and set before us the most clear and glorious Example of all Godliness and Virtue: is what the Angels admire, and for what we never can be sufficiently thankful.

And that after he had publish'd his Holy Gospel, and confirmed the Truth of it by Miracles, and set forth the Nature of it by his own most

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Holy Life; that then he should freely yield up himself to a sharp and shameful Death upon the Cross, to save us from Destruction and Misery, which our Sins had brought upon us; (for the Iniquities of us all were laid on him;) and to advance us to Eternal Life: is what deserves our highest Esteem, and Love, and the Praise and Service of our whole Life. So that he might justly say, *if we did love Father and Mother more than him, we were not worthy of him.* That is: if we did not Honour and Love him above every Thing in this World, that we had the best Arguments and strongest Reasons to love most; we were unworthy of the invaluable Favours and Kindness purchased for us *by his most precious Death and Sufferings*; far exceeding all that we had or could receive from any other.

2. May then the Consideration of what Christ hath acted and endured for us, oblige us to love him above all, to Obey him with all our Might and Power, and to Walk worthy of our High Calling; being in readiness, not only to do whatever he commands us, but to suffer all that shall be laid upon us, for the Honour of his Name, and in Testimony to the Truth of his most Holy Religion.

May we ever Fear, Honour, Reverence, and Esteem the Lord our God, the Founder of our Beings, and the Author of all our Felicity.

May we be Kind, Just, Faithful, Trusty, Beneficial, and Serviceable to Men, the Noble Work-

Workmanship of his Hands, and our nearest Relations.

So shall we Live beloved of all, and Die universally lamented; so shall we spend the Days of our Pilgrimage with the truest Comfort, and end them with the greatest Happiness. *Which God of his infinite Mercy grant.*

S E R M O N X V

G A L A T I A N S V I

As we have therefore Opportunity, let us

to spend our time in that especially when

their minds are of the household of

faith.

And as we have therefore Opportunity, let us

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S E R M O N X V I



SERMON XV.

GALATIANS VI. 10.

As we have therefore Opportunity, let us do good unto all Men, especially unto them who are of the Household of Faith.

THE *Galatians* were so free from Prejudice, and did so deliberately and impartially Consider the Reasons to profess the Religion of Jesus Christ, that they quickly became Converts to his Name, and did readily embrace the Truths of his Gospel; entring upon the Holy Life which Christ had given them an Example of, and which was so strictly enjoined by his Laws.

But

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But notwithstanding they did set out so well, yet there was want of steddiness in their Resolutions to persevere in the good way which was discovered unto them; the Sense of Piety decay'd in them, and they fell off from the Love of Christ, and strayed from the Paths that lead to Heaven, into which they had been guided by his Blessed Spirit.

They relapsed to their old Course, and their Affections did return to the Carnal Enjoyments permitted by the Law. So that the Apostle does reproach and reprove them with great Sharpness, such as the ill State of their Condition did require. *O foolish Galatians; who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the Truth, before whose Eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the Flesh? Gal. 3. 1, 3.* It was a very Foolish Thing, and their Behaviour in this Matter as unaccountable as if they had been under the Power of Witchcraft; after such clear Convictions on their Minds that the Christian Religion was true, and after they were acted by the Holy Ghost, and had felt its Operations in their Souls disposing them to a pure and godly Conversation; that they again should readmit any favourable Thoughts of the *Mosaick* Institution, and hope to justify themselves with God by an Observance of a few Rites and Ceremonies, and outward Performances of the Law, that had made no Man perfect by the Obedience he had paid unto it.

Great is the Frailty of Human Nature; and it has not appeared in any Thing more than in the Miscarriages of good Men, who by putting too great Confidence in their own Wisdom and the Power to govern themselves, have shamefully fallen below the Excellency of their Condition, and done Things unworthy of their Profession. A Man never loseth himself sooner, than by a Presumption of his own Ability; and he never stands so firmly and securely, as, when out of an humble Sense of his Weakness, he places his Trust in God.

The Apostle tells the *Galatians*, *You did run well; who did hinder you that you should not obey the Truth?* Gal. 5. 7.

They had not only taken the right Way, but made a swift Progress in it. But a Confidence of their own Wisdom betrayed them into Error; and stiff Adherence to their Errors did spoil the Benignity of their Temper, and make Havock of their Good Will, and Charity; so that instead of a due Discharge of the Christian Offices of Friendship, they did bite and devour one another.

St. Paul knew no better Course to recover them out of their Mistakes about their Obligation to *Moses's* Law, than by an Endeavour to allay and compose their violent Passions. Knowing well, that if once he could soften their fowre and churlish Humour, and restore them to a Christian Temper and Spirit; as they would be in a better Preparation to hear and consider all useful Truths, which should be pro-
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pounded to them; so they would not be tempted again so easily to part with the right Notions, that they had embraced with much Calmness and Deliberation.

But in the Management of their Consciences he vehemently presses upon them the necessity of a Holy Life; assuring them that the final Issue of all, would happen according to the Conduct of their Lives; and that at the last Day they should receive a favourable Sentence, not so much for the Truth of their Opinions, as the Holiness of their Conversation. *For whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap everlasting Life.*

Wherefore he above all Things urges Piety of Life upon them, and that they would proceed in the Practice thereof to the very End. *And let us not be weary of well-doing, for we shall reap if we faint not.*

And he further explains himself, and is more particular in the Words of the Text. *And as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all Men, especially unto them who are of the Household of Faith.*

In which Words we have a Declaration of the large extensive Nature of this great Duty of doing good; it is not limited to Times or Persons; but being without Confinement or Restraint, does extend it self to all Seasons and all Men.

We are to decline no Occasion of doing good, and to exclude no Man from the Benefit of our Charity; tho' where they stand in Competition, we are in the first place to bestow our Charity upon the *Household of Faith*, upon Christians rather than Infidels.

Where we cannot help Both, by reason of want of Opportunity or Ability; we are first to relieve the Virtuous and them that heartily love God, our Patrons, our Benefactors, our Relations and Friends: And then as we have Opportunity, let us do good unto all Men, &c.

Two Things naturally spring from the Text.

(1.) That we are to embrace all Opportunities of doing good.

(2.) We are to extend our Charity to all Men; none are to be excluded from our Bounty, tho' there be Qualifications and Circumstances which give some the Preference to others.

(1.) We are to lay hold on all Opportunities to do good. But this we shall never be able to do, before a great Change is wrought in the Frame of our Evil Nature. When the Love of God is so deeply rooted in our Souls, that we spend a great deal of our Time in Meditations upon him, and his mighty and glorious Works; and it is the earnest Desire of our Hearts to grow like unto him, and to follow his Example in all those Instances wherein a Creature can imitate his Creator; then we shall attain that Divine Disposition of Soul, which will

keep

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keep us in a constant and steddy Resolution to do good.

For they that often think of the great Love of God to the World; must admire his Excellencies, and adore his infinite Kindness, and strive to do all the good which comes within the Compass of their narrow Capacities. He therefore, who is of so Godlike a Temper, as to preserve himself in a perpetual readiness to supply the Wants, and to advance the Happiness of his Fellow Creatures; will with ease and pleasure put forth himself into practice of this great Duty of the Text, *as he has opportunity to do good unto all Men.* But as he that *does not love his Brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God, whom he hath not seen*; so on the contrary, unless the Love of God be the governing Principle in our Hearts, our Charity to Men will be cold, unstable, and uncertain. For they that in the Course of their Lives do not set the Lord before them, can never have a settled tender Care of their distressed Brethren.

Such Men, indeed, when they are in a pleasant Humour, may give a small Alms to a poor Beggar; or when a very sad Object does raise their Compassion above its ordinary Pitch; or, to purchase their Peace against a violent and very troublesome Importunity, they may be prevailed on to open their Purses; By dispersing a little among the Needy and Helpless, sometimes they may escape a Disgrace, so that Shame may make them Charitable; or they may serve a worldly Turn by it; or they may get Credit by it, and feed

feed their Vain-Glory, by distributing their Alms before Men.

They therefore who do not do good upon a sound and honest Principle, their Charity does not come from them according to the just Occasions they meet with to help and relieve the Necessities of others; but by uncertain Fits, and Accidents, and unaccountable Starts in the Temper of their Body, or in the Humour of their Company; or as they may carry on some By-End, which by another Method cannot be accomplished.

But he alone who esteems God in his Heart above the World, and who is a sincere Worshipper of him, and who has a Kindness for Men because they have the Image of God stamped upon them, does Embrace every Opportunity to do good; does constantly, carefully, and vigorously lay himself out in easing the Miseries, quieting the Troubles, and subduing the Fears of his Fellow Creatures.

This is that Heavenly Man, who, in Conformity to his Blessed Saviour, goes about doing good; he studies all the Ways he is capable of, to shew Mercy; he treats every Creature kindly and tenderly, that comes under his Command, or within the Verge of his Power.

The Benefits that he bestows upon others, are not merely Casual and Contingent; but they are as constant as the Opportunities which are presented unto him of doing good. Every Year, Month, Week, and even Day, afford some occasion of testifying the reality of his Love for God,

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God, by his one way or other ministring to the necessity of his People.

He searches out Objects to exercise his Pity upon; his Ears are always open to the Cries of the Poor; he hears all his Complaints with Patience, how sorry and mean soever his State and Condition is; and so having a truer Knowledge of his Wants, is able in the most proper way to help and supply him.

He visits the Sick and the Poor, the miserableness of whose Condition does melt his Heart into an unusual Degree of Tenderness; so that he is very bountiful in the Dispersion of his Money, very Compassionate to them who suffer Affliction; grave, earnest, and careful in reproving Sinners, who have brought Poverty upon themselves by their own Folly and Wickedness; There is so much Good will appear in his reprehending their evil Manners, and he does it with so much Privacy, that they cannot but secretly value and love him, tho' what he says may be very cross to the Viciousness of their present Inclinations.

We cannot but here observe, that the instilling Virtue and Goodness early into the Minds of Children, is the most probable Way of making them Holy, Humble, Meek, and Pure, thro' the whole course of their Lives; and so not be likely to fall under the want of such Reproofs as we have mentioned. Our Charity never comes up nearer to the Spirit of our Blessed Lord and Master, than when it is concerned about the Souls of Men, to furnish them with right Notions

tions of Religion, to use the truest Arguments to confirm the wavering Christians, and establish them in the Faith. A good Man has a vast Pity for wounded Consciences, and those whom God has smitten with his own Hand: He is very solicitous to remove the Scruples which afflict their Minds; and he is conscientiously concerned to speak such Things as may minister Peace, as may recover the ancient Quiet and Comfort they had in their Souls; and to bring them to a good degree of hope, that notwithstanding the present Trouble, and Darkness, and Fear upon their Spirits, yet God has not cast them off, but does love them, and, when there is a fit Season, will remove all the Occasions of their Sorrow, disperse their dreadful Fears, and let in the Light of his Countenance upon them, to their great and unspeakable Joy.

Thus he lets no Opportunity pass by him, of putting forth his Charity; as not knowing, tho' the same good Disposition of Mind should remain, whether God would afford him the like Occasion again of doing good or not.

How commendable then is it to be in a steady course of distributing our Charity? how beneficial is this to the vast Numbers in a distressed Condition? Particularly, they that are under a daily Concern and a constant Expence in providing for Young Children, can neither be reproached by others for a Covetous Heart, nor have their own Consciences smite them for hiding in a Napkin the Talents wherewith God hath intrusted them.

(2.) As he uses every Opportunity, so also he does good to All Men: He does not only good unto them from whom he has received good, which the Virtue of Gratitude does oblige him unto, and which we often find practised among worldly Men; but also he is kind to them from whom he has received no Favour at all; and not only to them who have laid no Obligation upon him, but he likewise is ready to do good to them who have done him Injuries, who have evil intreated him, and who without any fit cause have listed themselves in the Number of his Enemies.

Thus the Founders and Maintainers of Charity-Schools, being moved by a true Principle of doing good, do not take Children, because their Parents have been their Friends and Acquaintances, and reject others because they may have received some Injury from them; but their Chief Regard in the Choice of Children is the great Necessity, Poverty, and Honesty of the Parents; and by these Measures they govern their Proceedings.

And in this Inclination to universal Charity, a Christian writes after the Copy of his great and glorious Maker, who suffers his Sun to shine upon the Unjust as well as the Just; and who with his Dews and gentle Showers, cools the Earth, and ripens the Herbage and Corn, both for the use of good and bad Men. A sincere Christian does not therefore confine his Charity to any one Sect or Denomination of Men, how great Obligations

ligations soever they may have laid upon him ; he does not reserve his Kindnesses all for his own Party, in whose Interests he may be linked, and from whom he has the highest probabilities of receiving the most advantageous Returns : But he has a constant Aptness in his Mind to be bountiful to Strangers, like that of *Abraham* the Father of the Faithful, who, in part of the reward of his extensive Charity, had thereby the honour to entertain Angels unawares. He finds a secret Pleasure springing up in his Mind, exceeding all sensual Delight ; when he does good to them that he never knew before, and is not likely ever to see again.

And upon this Account, when the way of his Life happens to be very private and retired from the World, so as there may be many sad, miserable, and distressed Objects, of which he cannot easily have any Notice or Information ; he secretly does disperse his Alms by the faithful Hand of other good Men, who have more Opportunities to discover the Wants and Calamities of Mankind, and so his Bounty is conveyed far and near into unknown and remote Corners ; and he expects no other Reward, but that God has laid up Heaven for them who for his Sake Cloath the Naked, Refresh the Thirsty, Feed the Hungry, and Comfort the Afflicted.

Now the same Love and Reverence for God, which prompts a good Man to be kind and merciful to Strangers, does also engage him to do good to his Enemies, and to forgive all the Wrongs and Evil Usage which he has received from their

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Hands. He does not cease to perform true Service to the Souls of Men, notwithstanding their Malice is so great, that they hate him for his good Will; He loves them, wishes well to them, and is ready to do his best to reclaim them from their Sins, notwithstanding they reproach him for his Piety.

For, their Unthankfulness and Ingratitude, their Malice and Spite, and Designs even to ruin him, because he tells them the Truth, which is so unpleasing to their masterless Lusts; does not hinder him from labouring to recover their Souls, and to bring them into due Subjection to their Blessed Redeemer. He continues to Pity and to Pray for them, that God in his own Time would have greater Compassion for them than they have for themselves, and rescue them from out of the Jaws of Death and Misery.

I know it is a hard Work for Flesh and Blood to render Good for Evil, and to be ready to treat them kindly who have used us ill, and still are contriving how they may do Mischief unto us: But for all that, by the heavenly Assistances which the Christian Religion does provide for us, the Exercise of this Duty will not prove so difficult, and the Reason of it will appear very forcible.

For he that loves his Enemies, and has Pity on their poor Children, does that for them, which Christ did for us all; who being affronted by our Ingratitude, provoked by our Blasphemy, and shamefully and cruelly used by our malicious Spite, yet laid down his Life for us, that he
might

might Redeem us from both the Filthiness and the Misery of our Iniquities.

He that loves his Enemies, and returns Kindness for Injuries; if they be not worse than Men, uses the best course to reclaim them from their base Ingratitude, to soften their surly Tempers, and restore Peace, and Love, and Good Will among Men.

But it will not be amiss here to advise those, who, by reason of the small share they yet have in their Hearts of the true Christian Spirit, do complain of the harshness of this Duty; to take Care they do not mistake Them for their Enemies, which really are not so; And, to avoid this, they ought not to have their Ears too open to Tale-bearers, and such as carry little Stories, not so much out of a Love to Truth, or a hearty Kindness to the Persons to whom they bring News, as from a mean Design to serve themselves by their false Flattery.

And in the next place they ought to walk warily, and govern themselves with a great deal of Circumspection, not needlessly making themselves any one Enemy: For tho' it is not in our power to oblige every Body, who may expect it from our Hands; yet our Behaviour may be so cautious and prudent, as rarely to give Men any just occasion of Offence: And where by Reason of Human Frailty and Inadvertency we chance so to do, it becomes us both as good Christians and as wise Men, immediately to acknowledge our Error, to beg pardon for it, and to make the speediest

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speediest and best Satisfaction that reasonably can be expected.

Now he that taketh exact care not to offend with his Tongue, or in his Actions; and when he happens to have slipt, is ready to make Reparation for the Injury; cannot easily draw the Rage of Men upon him, or make himself many Enemies.

Again, he that is not apt to think ill of others, but does put the kindest and most favourable Construction upon their Actions; will very difficultly fall out with them, or become an Enemy to many. He will not suffer every flying Tale to make a distastful Impression upon his Mind, or to alter the sweetness of his Nature, and to abate his Affections to his Neighbour:

But he has a special Regard to the Advice of the Preacher. *Also take no heed to all words that are spoken; lest thou bear thy servant curse thee. For oftentimes also thy own heart knoweth, that thou thy self likewise hast cursed others, Eccl. 7. 21, 22.*

It now only remains, that I enforce this Duty of doing good, with one or two Considerations.

(I.) Consider that by Deeds of Charity we do God's own Work, who hath taken upon himself the Care of the Poor. So that whenever we relieve one of our distressed Brethren, and give Education to their Sons and Daughters, we execute one of the merciful Designs with which God has charged his Providence.

When we Feed the Hungry, and Cloath the Naked, and Instruct the Ignorant; we are Agents for Heaven, we pursue the Will of God, we bring those good Things to pass, which he has engaged himself to perform. *When the poor and needy seek for water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them,* Isaiah 41. 17. Now what a Comfort must it be to our Souls, to join with the great God, in carrying on his wise and tender Designs of doing Good to the World? Which we have all the reason to hope is done in the Pious and Charitable Education of Children. How Blessed is Their Condition, who are Workers together with God, in procuring the Peace and Happiness of their Fellow Creatures? What ample Satisfaction will God make us, for our humble and hearty Endeavours to assist him, and for vindicating the Wisdom and Goodness of his Providence? *He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given, will he pay him again,* Prov. 19. 17.

(2.) Nothing so agrees with the Nature of our Religion, or so well becomes Christians, as a Charitable Mind. It was pure Charity in God, that brought forth our Religion, and derived the blessed and Merciful Effects of it upon us. *For God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.*

And

And nothing but pure Love in Christ, moved him to undertake the Redemption of Mankind, when they lay weltring in their own Blood, in a lost and miserable Condition. And I trust, it is from the deep Esteem and Honour of God, and true Affection to his Creatures, which he requires us to love in equal Degrees with our selves; that so many noble Deeds of Charity, now visible to our Eyes, do proceed.

And as our Religion was founded in Love, so all the particular Duties thereof are contracted and summed in the Acts of Love. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind, and thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.*

God himself is Love; and to love God and Men is the Design of our Religion, and the natural Effect of the many Precepts therein contained. Indeed, unless Christian Charity has a full possession of our Hearts, there is hardly any Duty that we can perform as we ought to do: But if Love and Charity bear rule in our Souls, there is nothing that our blessed Master Christ requires of us, but the Practice of it will be easy and pleasant.

If we love our Brother as our selves, we shall easily be disposed to Poverty of Spirit, to humble Opinions of our selves, and to good ones to our Neighbours; we shall be Meek, not easily provoked or displeased, but put the most candid Sense upon Actions and Things. To be merciful, will be the Business of our Lives; and we shall rejoice in the heavenly Office of being Peace-makers.

We shall abhor Murder, and Theft, and Adultery; shall suffer the greatest wrong our selves, rather than bear False Witness against our Neighbour; and being fully satisfied with the Portion of this Worlds Good, which God has allotted to our share; we shall be so far from coveting any Thing that is Another's, that according to the degree wherein God has enabled us, we shall be ready kindly to assist him in all our Capacities.

(3.) Consider that the joyful Consequences of your Charity to poor Children, will be most durable and lasting, and go along with you into the other World. For when all the Pomp, and Glory, and State, and Splendor of this World, wherewith we did so greedily fill our Eyes, shall pass away, and we shall behold no more of its Fine and Gawdy Shews; when all the Wealth and Riches, that Men have spent their whole Days in heaping up, shall minister no more Comfort, but appear what really they are, a dull and useles Lump of Earth: When all the Brutish Pleasures of Sense shall be at an End; and Wine, and Wit, and Prophane Company shall no longer Refresh and Recreate the decay'd and languishing Body; and the dreadfull Fears of Death and Judgment shall terrify, and be ready to overwhelm the Miserable Sinner: What unconceivable Pleasure will spring up in the Heart of the Good and Merciful Man, upon the Reflection he shall make of his having improved the Talents wherewith he was entrusted; upon the Consideration that he has dedicated the
Power

Serm. XV. Of doing Good to all Men. 357

Power, and Authority, and Estate, and Interest he had in the World, to the Glory of God, and to the Comfort and Advantage of all his Fellow Creatures! Every Deed of Charity that then comes into his Memory, will produce a fresh Act of Joy and Delight in his Soul. O how sweet and charming upon a Death-bed will the Remembrance be of the many good Works we did out of a profound Reverence to God, and a sincere Kindness to Men! How inexpressible will the Comfort be, which will rise up in our Souls, when, in our last Hours, we reflect how great and hearty Benefactors we have been to the Education of poor Children, and the instructing them in the Fear and Love of God; which is the Foundation, the Beginning and the End of all true Wisdom!

For such an Education is the right course to establish Piety, Virtue, Honesty, and Diligence in our Country; and these are the only Means that can cause any Nation to Prosper and Flourish, to obtain the Favour and Blessings of God, and the Esteem, and Good-will, and Assistance of Men. These are the just and true Methods to banish Prophaneness and Irreligion, to make Men not only Healthy and Industrious, and Thriving, but Meek, Humble, Merciful, the greatest Lovers and the greatest Practisers of all real and solid Goodness and Virtue.

How, I say, will the Reflection upon a Charitable and well-spent Life, strengthen the Acts of our Faith in Jesus Christ our precious Redeemer at the Hour of Death; how will it en-

large and inflame our Affections for God, to whom we have rendered so many faithful and acceptable Services!

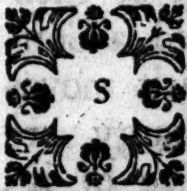
With what mighty Advantages shall we launch into a boundless Eternity, who have established so firm a Peace with our great Master and Righteous Judge! With what a well-grounded Assurance shall we enter into the Presence of God, without the least Dread or Consternation of Mind; who has expressly declared, that he will interpret all the Kindness and Pity we have done to the poor distressed Members of our Lord Christ, as done unto himself; and that at the Day of general Judgment, he will place us with the Sheep on his Right Hand! I conclude with the Words of our Blessed Saviour, which demonstrate the Truth of all I have said. Then shall the King say unto them on the Right Hand, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* Then shall he also say unto them on the Left Hand, *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels: For I was an hungred and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, &c.* And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life Eternal.



SERMON XVI.

I P E T I. 22.

Seeing you have purifyed your Souls in obeying the truth thro' the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren : see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.

 O great a Change does the Christian Religion make in Men, that it is called Regeneration, a new Birth, being born again ; and two of the most visible Effects of this Change are *Purity* and *Love*, both expressed in our Text : The Christian's Soul is *purify'd* unto an *unfeigned love*.

And all this is brought about in good Men through the Spirit, by the Influences and Operations of the Holy Spirit, without which we can neither pray to God so as to be heard and accepted, nor perform any thing as we ought to do.

We therefore commemorate at this time, the great Love of God, after he had recalled his Son our dear Redeemer, in sending the Holy Ghost to instruct and comfort his Church. The Assistance of the Holy Spirit was great, necessary, and manifold, according as the several Ages, States, and Needs of the Church did require.

In the beginning of the Church, a miraculous and extraordinary Power was necessary to Plant and Propagate the Religion of Christ; which, after the first Necessities thereof were supply'd, did cease; But in all Times, the Help and Influence of the Blessed Spirit is of absolute Necessity, not only for the Preservation of the whole Church, but for the Guidance and Support of every single Christian.

Now of the ordinary Helps of the Spirit, which are common to all Ages and Christians, I shall treat at this time,

(1.) It brings Sinners to a true Sense of their Danger, while they abide in so wretched a Condition. Wicked Men, before the Spirit moves in their Hearts, like Persons in a Lethargy, are near Death, without taking any notice of it; as it was in the Days of Noah, they Eat, and Drink, and deny themselves nothing that the brutish Flesh desires; never thinking of Danger, and that *for all these things they shall be brought to judgment.*

But the Spirit awakens their Minds out of this stupid State, and discovers plainly to them the great Hatred which God has against Sin. It lays before

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before a bad Man the woful Condition he has cast himself into, in so lively a manner, that he can no longer doubt of the hazard he runs by continuing in his Sins: It shews the large train of Miseries, which are inevitably entailed upon an ill Life; that Death and future Punishment are the sad, but certain Fruits thereof; and that it will pull down upon him the insupportable Wrath of God; which Thoughts cannot but cool his Appetite to unlawful Pleasures, how eagerly soever he did pursue them; and make him uneasy in the midst of his Riches, and Company, and Delights, which did before divert him.

When he knows that God is angry, who can consume him; when he does not know but Death may be close by, even at the Door, which will put an end to all things in which he used to please himself; he cannot but feel a coldness in his Spirits, and find his Heart to sink.

O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions! unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things; yea, unto him that is yet able to receive meat. Ecclus. 41. 1.

Now in divers and sundry manners does the Spirit of God bring a Man to the Knowledge of his Condition, and fills him with fear upon the Reflections he makes of his danger.

Sometimes a Passage in a Sermon reacheth the Heart of him who came thither to find faults with the Preacher, or some other way to divert himself for the space of an Hour.
And

And it does so mortify the Opinion he had of his own Safety, and take down the Pride of his Soul; that a Fit of trembling comes upon him, as it did on the Goaler; and he is ready to fall down at the feet of him, whom before he did despise; and to pray for Information, *what he must do to be saved?*

Sometimes the Spirit injects a fearful Thought into a Man's Mind, when he is busy in laying a bad Design, or just when he is about to do some Sin; which makes his Heart to fail him, and his Spirits to flag, and so he dares not to finish the Evil he was contriving.

Often the Calamity of Another is apply'd to our Condition by the Spirit, and That reclaims us. Other times a Text of Holy Scripture, or a good Man, or a good Book, rouse us out of our false Security: We cannot but lay to Heart what they have said very seasonably concerning our Condition, which thro' the Spirit proves the occasion of our true Repentance.

Again, the Spirit of God, by so slight an Instrument as a Dream, may not only terrify a Man while he sleeps, but also when he awakes, cause the fear to continue to such a degree, that he shall grow cool and serious; and upon a faithful enquiry, find out the dreadful hazard he runs, of making himself miserable.

When I say, my bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint, then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me thro' visions, so that my Soul chuseth strangling and death rather than life, Job 7. 14, 15. And again, Job 32. 14, 15, 16,

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16, 17, 18. *For God speaketh once, yea twice, and man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed: then openeth he the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction: that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man: he keepeth back his Soul from the pit.*

(2.) After the Spirit has laid open to a Man the frightful Circumstances of a wicked Life, it does fix his Thoughts upon them, and not suffer any other Object to divert them; so as he may truly consider, and be deeply affected with the lamentable case into which his Iniquity has plunged him.

But let a Truth in which a Man is most concern'd be plainly revealed unto him, yet you are not to expect he should be much moved therewith, if, other things breaking into his Mind, he does not allow himself time seriously to think of it.

Wherefore as the Holy Spirit does lead Men to the Knowledge of all the fatal Consequences of offending God, so it fixes and fastens their Contemplations such a long while upon them, that they grow mighty apprehensive of their dreadful Danger. That which stops due Consideration of any Matter, is the interruption our Minds have from fresh things getting into the Thoughts.

Hence it follows, that when the Holy Ghost has engaged a bad Man in the Consideration of
his

his own Misery occasion'd by his Sin, that it does for a sufficient time either stop the entrance of new Objects into the Mind, or else restrain the Violence of their Impressions, so as that they do not discompose it, and carry its Meditations to another Point or Subject, until it has thoroughly weigh'd this in the balance of the Sanctuary.

(3.) The next Motion of the Soul, after it is arrived at a lively apprehension of its own deplorable State, must be to get out of it. Now an earnest desire to free it self from the inconveniences of its present Condition, is to repent: In carrying on of which work of Repentance, Men have great Assistance from the Holy Spirit. It offers unto distressed Sinners the most powerful Arguments to repent, taken from the Considerations of Heaven and Hell; and is ready to furnish them with sufficient help, to go thorough with such a mighty Work. Now as this method of reducing Sinners to Repentance, does suit with the Nature of the thing; so it is agreeable to those Accounts we have in the Scriptures of God's Proceedings with them.

For this was the course our Lord did take himself, and into which he did put his Apostles, when he sent them abroad to preach the Gospel; *From that time Jesus began to preach, and say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, Matt. 4. 17.* The Apostles likewise went and preached, that *Men should repent, i. e. change the course of their Lives,*

But

But now there is no leading Men to such a Change as Repentance does import, without having first convinced them of the Danger of their present Condition: *Knowing the terrors of the Lord*, saith St. Paul, *we perswade men*; i. e. after he once had brought them really to believe that God would inflict great and intolerable Punishments upon them, if they did continue in their Sins; he soon perswaded them to repent, which was to forsake their Sins.

So also the Apostle try'd to engage *Felix* the Governor in a righteous, sober, and chaste course of Life, by proving unto him the Certainty of a future Judgment, where he should be accountable for all the Actions he had done in this World. And had the Fit of trembling into which he was struck by St. Paul's excellent Discourse, produced serious Thoughts in his Mind for any length of time, so as he might fully have meditated upon the dreadful End of his wicked course of living; in all likelihood he would have been brought over to a sound and durable Repentance.

And here we cannot but a little bewail the case of an old Sinner, who will find it so difficult to take a true and exact view of his own Misery, and to search to the bottom of a Cause which will fill him with horror.

The Effects of his Wickedness do carry such a Terror along with them, that he is so far from deliberately considering them, that he does all he can to get them quite out of his Thoughts: He creates Business, or he runs into Company, and

and even forsakes himself, that he may suppress and stifle the Consideration of what is so uneasie and frightful to him.

But by this course the poor despairing Creature does but abuse himself, and impose upon his own Soul: For he does not cure the Evil which so amazeth him, but only covers it for a little time; and by being thus covered, the Malignity thereof will increase, and it will at length break with so much the more Fury.

No, O Sinner! neither Death nor Judgment will be at all the further off from thee, because thou hast got a foolish Art never to think of them: Nay, whenever they shall approach such a thoughtless Creature, (and approach thee they must,) they will be therefore the more horrible unto thee; and they shall surprize, and come unawares upon thee, when thou art in no degree prepared for them.

O! when the Sinner shall be forced to consider that the very Hours, wherein, by the help of the Spirit, he might have applied effectual Remedies to all the Grievs and Maladies of his Soul, and have made his Peace with God; have been spent upon vain and worthless Trifles, which did bring neither Pleasure nor true Satisfaction to his Mind; and which, therefore, did not deserve either his Care or his Love; how will his Blood be chilled, and all its Motions stop, and the wretched Man die away with Fear of God's Wrath, and Vexation at his own Folly and Madness!

When

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When there shall be such a universal Decay of his Strength and Spirits, that he can hold out no longer, nor have the least hope of Relief from further Applications, but he shall plainly feel Death creeping upon him, and admonishing him of the necessity of the parting of his Soul from the Body, and of leaving immediately every Thing that was dear and delightful to him; and when Conscience by the falling off of all Sensual and Brutish Pleasure, shall regain its just Power, and grow Clamorous, and loudly and fiercely reproach him with a mispent Life, and the abuse of God's Grace; And in the Prospect forward, nothing shall appear before him but Confusion, Misery and Darknes; In a word, when he shall be in hourly Expectation of a heavy Sentence from his once dear Saviour, and shall not find reason to hope he may have this terrible Sentence either deferred or mitigated; Nay, when he shall be infinitely ashamed for having made Christ wait upon him so long a Time, to gather him under his Wings, but he would not; and for having been deaf to an infinite Number of Calls of his Holy Spirit:

How bitterly then will this miserable Creature Repent, and how fruitless will the Repentance be, which begins with the dying Groans of him who all his Life scoffed at Piety and Virtue, and had Leisure to think of every Thing, but his God; and Time for every Work, but the breaking off his Sins by Repentance!

O who can be able to represent or imagine the Horror and Anguish which then will pene-
trate

trate thro' his Soul ! Who can conceive or describe the Dreadfulness of those Pangs and Terrors which will lay hold on him !

This will be the sad and lamentable Doom of every Man, who puts his Sins out of his Sight, that he may not think of them, and that they may give him no Trouble as long as he Lives. And nothing can be so dangerous as to be mere Strangers to our Souls ; nor so mischievous to our Eternal Happiness, as not to know the badness of our Condition till it's past all hope of Recovery.

But now, thro' the Aids of the Holy Spirit we come to a full Knowledge of our selves, and have so clear a View of all the Weaknesses and Calamities Sin has entailed upon us, that we find most urgent Desires rising up in our Souls, to be delivered from this distressed Condition.

And since we are convinced this cannot be done by any Strength or Device merely of our own, we must be much disposed to seek Abroad for Help : And a little Consideration will satisfy us, that such large Assistance as our distressed Condition does want, is only to be had from God.

(4.) Wherefore, in the Fourth Place, the poor Man feeling his own Infirmities, is guided to address himself to the Throne of God, and to beg he would be pleased to have Compassion on him in his sore Distress ; and that he would free him from the Burden of his Iniquities, which press with such a weight upon him.

And

And the Holy Spirit does the more fully open and expose the low State into which the Sins of Man have sunk him, that he may make a more entire Resignation to the Will of God ; and that we all may no longer presume to stand upon our own Bottom, or insist upon our own Right, or rely upon our own Power ; but going out of our selves, give up all to God, to whom we have made a Forfeiture of all we had ; and so resolve, for the time to come, wholly to be at the disposal of his wise and good Pleasure. The withdrawing our Hearts from the World, and resigning them up to God, is a Work of Difficulty and Time ; especially if we have had a vehement Love for the World, and intemperately used, or highly valued the good Things thereof.

But nothing will more lessen our Opinion of worldly Vanities, and further our progress in the Holy State, than steady and fixed Meditations upon God's Power and our own Weakness ; than frequent Thoughts upon our Crimes, and his Merciful Inclinations to forgive us ; upon your own Wants, and his large Bounty.

O what unspeakable Comfort must it create in a melancholy and despairing Sinner, when he turns his Eyes from the dismal Prospect of the Miseries which are ready to swallow him, unto the Contemplation of the Long-suffering and great Compassion in the Nature of God, which makes him so ready to receive with merciful Arms the worst of Offenders ! In himself he finds nothing that can quiet his Mind ; nothing that

can support it: But in God he beholds all that can be desired to the perfect Happiness of his Soul and Body.

While he thinks upon the sad Circumstances of his Iniquity, nothing but dreadful Thoughts present themselves before him, and the bottomless Pit seems to gape upon him, and to be ready to devour him: But as soon as ever he raises his Eyes up towards Heaven, how do the Glories of the Place chase away all his black and dismal Apprehensions! How does a view of the infinite Mercies of the Divine Nature cheer his Heart, and refresh his dispirited Nature, and restore Strength to his drooping Soul!

I know 'tis a hard matter to possess Men, who yet are Lovers of the Pleasures of the Flesh, with a Belief of the transcendent greatness of those Joys, which crowd into the Soul upon its turning from the vain World unto its mighty and sovereign Good.

But then as for those in whom the Spirit of God has concurr'd to work this happy Change, they will readily confess, that whatever has been said, does fall vastly short of the Comforts which they feel; and that no Tongue can set forth the Intenseness of those Pleasures and Joys which the Holy Ghost does produce in their Souls.

And because wicked Men have no Relish or Sense of Heavenly Pleasure, it is so difficult for them to part with their Sins, and to bring them to relinquish the mean, and brutish, and sordid Delights of Sense. Indeed it is, while they

they continue in an impenitent State, as impossible for them to partake of the Comforts which proceed from the Reflections upon a Holy Life, as to gather Grapes of Thistles. But let them think and speak as they please, the Truth is most manifest, that real and solid Happiness is nowhere to be found but in God.

For if we look round our selves, we are able to discover nothing but Folly, Want, Weakness, Complainings, and Discontent. So that only in the Favour of God, must we seek for a firm Foundation to raise the hope of true Peace and Comfort upon.

He can enlighten our disconsolate Souls, which grope in the dark, and stumble after Happiness without any likelihood to find it; he can settle our wandering and dissatisfy'd Thoughts upon such Objects as will ever refresh and delight them; he can change this State of Care, and Disappointments, and Sorrows, into an Eternity of bright and undisturbed Joy.

He can pull out the Sting of Death, upon which Men look with so much Horror; and make even Death it self desirable. For when thro' a powerful belief of God's Promises, we are heartily perswaded that Death will only prove to us a Passage into a State of infinite Blessedness; and that Christ, by dying for us, hath taken away the Bitterness thereof; how welcome will it come to Men, who have purify'd themselves thro' the Spirit! How pleased will they be, as they perceive Death to be drawing near to them!

Thus after the Holy Ghost has wrought in us a sound Hope of our entring into that everlasting Rest which God has provided for those who sincerely love and worship him, we then shall be so far from not daring to dye when God calls for us, that we shall look upon Death as the peculiar Privilege of the Saints. And we shall not be afraid to yield those Bodies to the Grave, in which now we joyfully perceive the Holy Spirit to dwell; and have his full Assurance, that by the Divine Power they shall again be raised out of the State of Death, and with our Souls be made Partakers of Eternal Life.

I now make one or two brief Inferences, and so shall dismiss the present Argument.

(1.) We may observe, that nothing can be the Motion of the Holy Ghost in our Souls, but what has a direct Tendency to Holiness and Charity. For if it be the peculiar Business of the Spirit to purify us unto an unfeigned Love of God and our Brethren, then whatsoever Suggestions we find rising within us to Uncleaness, or to Rancour or Malice, we may be sure they do not proceed from this blessed Spirit. Therefore all those Principles, how much soever they put on of the Colour of Religion, and with what Zeal soever they are managed, that tend to divide Men, to enlarge the Breaches, to widen the Differences, and to set them at greater variance; do certainly rise up from the black Den of the Prince of Darkness, who is the Author of Contentions, the Fomenter of all malicious Designs, and the

sworn

sworn Enemy of Christian Forbearance, Love and Charity.

But whatever makes us kindly affectioned one to another; whatever composes our Souls, and ends our Quarrels, and reduces us into a State of sincere Friendship; and whatever turns our Hearts against our Lusts, and kindles in them the love of Peace, Meekness, and Purity; and still causes them more fervently to breathe after greater degrees of the Divine Life; That most certainly is the Work and Fruit of God's Holy Spirit.

O how happy then are they, not who make unjust War upon their Neighbours, and conquer Countries by the length of their Sword, and fill the World with Blood; not who dwell in high Places, who possess vast Estates, who crush the Poor, or who have a great Name in the World, or who enjoy vigorous Health: But they who have set their Souls apart to be Habitations for the Holy Spirit; whose Ears are open to his Calls, and whose Wills are obedient to his Holy Motions; who do not despise, or neglect his Divine Inspirations, but submit themselves wholly to his guidance.

Who in all Conditions endeavour to live in an exact Conformity to his Dictates; and who in the sharpest Afflictions, and under the forest of Crosses and Disappointments, do sensibly feel his Comforts.

Who equally love and esteem, who alike praise and adore their Sovereign Lord and great Master, whether he is pleased to exercise their Patience with Troubles; or to refresh their Souls,
and

and reward their Virtue with his Blessings ; they having no doubt but that God knows what is most proper for them ; and that sometimes by Judgments, and sometimes by Mercies, he will first prepare, and then take them into the fruition of endless Happiness.

(2.) Let us remember, that this Blessed Spirit, from whom we receive all these inestimable Benefits, may be resisted and provoked to forsake us : Altho' he be closely united unto our Souls, yet we may do those ill things which will cause him to withdraw himself from us.

By an humble Behaviour we may cherish the Spirit, and by a proud one we may set him against us : For God gives his Grace to the humble, but he resists the proud.

By Prayers and giving of Thanks, and by Patience and Forbearance, and by Charity and Mercifulness, and by Purity and Innocence, we may excite the Spirit in our Hearts, and engage him to delight in us : But if we are Wrathful, Covetous, Revengeful, Selfish, and defile our Bodies with Intemperance and Lust, we shall grieve our Holy Guest ; for he will soon be weary of an impure Habitation, and leave it to the Possession of Devils. If we resist his gentle Motions, and rebel against him, he will turn to be our Enemy,

(3.) Lastly, it plainly from hence does follow, that it ought to be our greatest care, to render our Souls a decent and pure Dwelling for this most Holy Inhabitant. Let us invite him to take Possession

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Possession of our Hearts by our earnest Prayers ;
And when he has vouchsafed to come and
dwell in us, let us not resist his Light by our Ma-
lice, or quench his Motions by our Lust : But
let us heartily strive to do those things that will
truly please him ; so that by the Power of his
Assistance, we may perform our whole Christian
Duty, and perfect our Holiness in the fear of the
Lord.

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